

Rocket attack on Israel violated truce, panel rules

BEIRUT (AFP) — The international truce monitoring committee in South Lebanon on Friday ruled that a Katyusha rocket attack on northern Israel from South Lebanon was a violation of a U.S.-brokered ceasefire agreement.

The ruling after a seven-hour meeting by the five-nation committee came just hours after the official ANI news agency reported that two Palestinians had been arrested by the Lebanese authorities for the rocket attack on Wednesday.

A committee statement released after the meeting in the town of Naqura, on the Israeli-Lebanese border, described the rocket attack as "a violation of the April agreement."

The statement said the committee — comprising France, Israel, Lebanon, Syria and the United States — unanimously agreed the Katyusha attack violated the April 17, 1996, truce agreement ending Israel's 17-day onslaught against Hizbollah guerrillas in South Lebanon.

The accord calls on both Israel and Lebanese guerrillas to avoid targeting civilians in their on-going conflict or launching attacks from civilian areas.

The committee agreed to meet following a complaint by Israel alleging that at least one Katyusha had been fired into the Gailice region of northern Israel on Wednesday, without causing casualties or damage.

The panel has already met eight times to hear complaints from Israel and Lebanon. Although it cannot impose sanctions, the committee aims to contain fighting and avoid an escalation.

The committee statement said Lebanon reiterated that it would do all it could to ensure the ceasefire agreement was not broken, and it praised measures already taken by the Lebanese government to prevent any repetition of the rocket attack.

Earlier Friday, judicial sources told ANI that two members of radical Palestinian groups were arrested over the firing of at least one Katyusha into northern Israel.

The sources said the two were members of the unified command of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), led by George Habash, and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) of Nayef Hawatmeh.

But when contacted by AFP, representatives at the organisations' offices in Beirut denied that any of their members had been arrested or that the groups were involved in Wednesday's Katyusha attacks, which caused no injuries or damage.

A third group, the Damascus-based PFLP-General Command, also denied a report by Israeli radio that it was involved in the rocket strike for which there has been no claim of responsibility.

Hizbollah has denied it was responsible, while Nabih Berri, the Lebanese parliamentary speaker and leader of the pro-Syrian Shiite movement Amal, said the rockets were the work of a non-Lebanese organisation. A Lebanese Foreign Ministry spokesman said Beirut was satisfied with the committee's findings, stressing the committee "did not attribute responsibility for the incident to Lebanon."

On Thursday, General Amr Amr, head of Israel's northern command, accused Hizbollah guerrillas and other movements of using villages to launch attacks on the Israeli-occupied buffer zone in South Lebanon in violation of the eight-month-old truce accord.



Israeli police arrest a Palestinian man after he and another Palestinian began to fight in the centre of the West Bank town of Hebron over a traffic accident on Saturday. Hundreds of Israeli security forces will maintain control over the 20 per cent of Hebron to remain under Israeli rule after a long-overdue troop redeployment in the town (see page one)

EU sees U.N. as mediator in Turkey-Greece row

HAGUE (R) — The European Union (EU) said on Friday that, while the United Nations was best placed to mediate in a row between Greece and Turkey, it was prepared to play an active role in seeking a solution.

Turkey earlier threatened military action against Cyprus in a dispute over the divided island deploying Russian missiles.

Turkish Foreign Minister Tansu Ciller accused Greece of encouraging the Cypriot government to create a Mediterranean missile crisis and said Turkey could knock out a Russian anti-aircraft missile system the Greek Cypriots plan to install.

A Foreign Ministry spokesman in the Hague denied a Dutch television report that Prime Minister and current EU President Wim Kok had said the Netherlands would mediate in the dispute.

"What (KOK) said is that the Cyprus issue also comes on the Dutch plate, as EU president," Peter Mollema told Reuters.

"The European Union has a role to play there and, as the presidency, we are in an information-gathering phase to find out where everybody stands and what steps can be taken."

"We have to discuss it with all parties, including Russia and the United States, and we have to look carefully at the

relationship between Greece and Turkey.

"It's much too difficult at this stage to define what will be the best role to play. The problem is much too complicated. Together with all other parties we hope to be able to achieve some progress, but if you have to call anybody a mediator then it would be the United Nations."

The latest Turkish-Greek dispute was raised at a meeting in the Hague on Friday between Dutch Foreign Minister Hans van Mierlo and U.S. Assistant Secretary of State John Kornblum.

The two also discussed, in general terms, U.S.-EU ties, developments in the former Yugoslavia and the planned expansion of both NATO and the EU.

"On Yugoslavia, we (U.S. and EU) agreed to monitor closely what happens there and hope there will be a democratic solution," Mr. Mollema said.

He said the Dutch favour linking the planned expansion of the 15-member EU bloc with that of NATO, both of which are looking eastwards for new members.

"Our minister (Van Mierlo) said that you cannot proceed on the one track without doing something on the other, too. Both are clearly linked, though not formally."

Mr. Kornblum was due to go to Brussels for a meeting on Saturday of the five-nation contact group on former Yugoslavia.

Israelis prefer migrant workers to Palestinians

TEL AVIV (AFP) — A majority of Jewish Israelis would prefer to keep large numbers of immigrant workers in the country rather than allow Palestinian workers to take back their jobs, according to a poll released Saturday.

The Gallup poll released on Israeli army radio showed 58 per cent of Israelis were in favour of allowing foreign workers to stay in jobs occupied by Palestinians before Israel's closure of the Palestinian territories.

A total of 27 per cent of those polled wanted a reduction in foreign workers, while 15 per cent refused to comment.

The survey showed 74 per cent were in favour of expelling illegal foreign workers and 21 per cent were against the measure with four per cent making no decision.

But it also revealed that 54 per cent were against the expulsion methods currently in force which allow for arrest, detention and immediate expulsion without appeal.

The poll of 500 Jewish Israelis took no account of the one million Israeli-Arabs, and had a margin of error of four per cent.

During the last three years thousands of immigrant workers from Romania, Thailand, Poland, the Philippines and China have been allowed into Israel to replace Palestinians barred from reaching their jobs in the Jewish state by the intermittent closing off of the Palestinian territories for security reasons.

Around 100,000 immigrants have work permits, and it is estimated that there are at least another 100,000 illegal foreign workers in Israel.

Internal Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani announced last year a wave of measures to crack down on illegal immigrants, and a special detention camp was set up at a prison close to Tel Aviv.

Mr. Kahalani said the poll showed Israelis' concern with the issue of security, but he added that the government needed to look to the long-term interests of the country.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Charles to intervene in Saudi murder case — report

LONDON (AFP) — Prince Charles is expected to raise the case of two British nurses accused in Saudi Arabia of murdering an Australian colleague who he visits the kingdom in March, a press report said here Saturday. The three-day trip is aimed at drumming up British business orders, and any discussion of the case of Lucille McLauchlan, 31, and 41-year-old Deborah Parry is likely to be informal. But the Daily Mail said senior British officials had said they were confident that Prince Charles would raise the affair when he meets the Saudi royal family. The families of the two nurses are set to visit them in jail on Sunday in the women's wing of a prison in the eastern city of Dammam. Stan and Ann McLauchlan are travelling to Saudi Arabia with members of Ms. Parry's family. If convicted, the two nurses could face the death penalty under Islamic law in Saudi Arabia. Ms. McLauchlan and Ms. Parry are accused of stabbing to death 55-year-old Yvonne Gilford on Dec. 11 at the King Fahd military medical complex in eastern Dammam. Both have pleaded earlier, confessing, saying they were coerced into confessing. Their allegations have been denied by Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayef.

Qatar emir pardons 64 prisoners

DOHA (R) — Qatar's Emir Sheikh Hamad Ben Khalifa Al Thani on Saturday ordered the release of 64 prisoners on the occasion of the start of the fasting month of Ramadan, officials said. The amnesty did not cover political and drug-related offences, they added. Qatar began observing Ramadan on Friday.

Homosexual wins widower's pension

TEL AVIV (AFP) — An Israeli homosexual has won a court battle to obtain a widower's pension after the death of his partner, a colonel in the Israeli army, military radio reported on Saturday. The army had refused to grant Nadir Steiner the payment after the death of his partner Colonel Doron Mazel, arguing that pension rights did not extend to a homosexual couple. But a Tel Aviv court on Friday ruled in Steiner's favour, a decision his lawyer Amnon Ben Dror described as historic. "For the first time in the world a homosexual partner is going to obtain a pension paid by the state," Mr. Dror said, adding that the ruling should act as a precedent for other public services such as the police. Steiner, who has been fighting a court battle over the issue for several years, hailed the ruling as "a spectacular advance for the rights of individuals and homosexuals."

U.S. hits Turkey for 'irresponsible' talk on Cyprus

WASHINGTON (R) — The United States on Friday renewed pressure on Turkey to end what it called "irresponsible" comments on Cyprus and said its envoy in talks this weekend would urge Greeks and Turks to take immediate steps to calm tensions.

For the second straight day, Ankara on Friday threatened military action against Cyprus to stop it deploying Russian missiles and said it might occupy an abandoned tourist resort on the island if the Cypriot government did not back down.

Comments by Foreign Minister Tansu Ciller "seemed to up the ante from the tendentious statements made yesterday by the Turkish defence minister" and add to the "irresponsible public commentary" on the missile issue by Ankara, State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said.

Mrs. Ciller said in Ankara on Friday that Turkey could knock out the anti-aircraft missile system the Cypriot government plans to install under a deal made with Russia last weekend.

"These offensive missiles will definitely not be deployed. If they are deployed we

will do what is needed, if that means they need to be hit they will be hit," Mrs. Ciller told reporters.

Mr. Burns said that if Mrs. Ciller was "quoted accurately, we believe such dramatic statements from her or any other Turkish official are uncalled for and most unwise."

"As we have made clear this week, the United States does not support the decision by the government of Cyprus to purchase and, in the future, deploy the SA-10 anti-aircraft missile system," he told a news briefing.

"But nevertheless, any threat of the use of force, any decision to use force, is absolutely beyond the bounds of acceptable international behaviour," he added.

Some U.S. officials said privately they believe the inflammatory comments by Turkish officials are motivated in large measure by Turkey's domestic politics.

But they fear the statements are worsening an already difficult atmosphere in which to revive peace talks on Cyprus.

"There's no reason for this to become a

crisis. That's why we're so puzzled by the Turkish government reaction. This is out of control for war," one U.S. official said.

Some U.S. officials said that despite denials by Nicosia, they believe the missile deal may not be irreversible. But Mr. Burns rejected suggestions that Nicosia had manufactured the crisis.

Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktaş added to tensions by warning of moves to integrate the abandoned resort of Varosha into Cyprus' Turkish sector if the missile deal proceeds.

Varosha, once the island's top tourist resort and mostly owned by Greek Cypriots, has been left abandoned under Turkish military control since 1974 when Turkey invaded northern Cyprus after a coup in Nicosia engineered by the military junta then ruling Greece.

"We think everyone in the Eastern Mediterranean — Turks, Greeks, Cypriots, the parties on Cyprus — should draw back from this type of aggressive public rhetoric," Mr. Burns said.

"They should sit down together. And they

JORDAN TELEVISION

PROGRAMME TWO

13:05 ... Min Alhadi Al-Mohammadi

13:30 ... The Famous Five

15:00 ... Feature Film

16:50 ... Call For Prayer And Hilar

17:30 ... You Bet Your Life

18:00 Magazine — Faut Pas

19:00 ... Le Journal

19:15 Magazine — Sports Et

19:30 ... News Headlines

19:35 ... Fresh Prince Of Bel-Air

20:02 ... Oriental Rugs

20:30 ... Science Fiction Babylon 5

21:10 ... Tycoon (Documentary)

22:00 ... News in English

22:25 ... Islam in a Changing World

23:00 ... Hot Shots

23:50 ... The River Kings

01:15 ... Ramadan Talks

PRAYER TIMES

05:11 ... Fajr

06:32 ... (Sunrise) Doha

11:34 ... Dhuhur

15:31 ... 'Asr

16:55 ... Maghreb

18:17 ... 'Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church

Switzerland, Tel. 810740

Assemblies of God Church Tel.

632785

St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590

Church of the Annunciation

614190

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

Warm weather conditions will prevail during the day becoming cool at night with winds southeasterly moderate. In Aqaba, winds will be northerly moderate and seas calm.

Min/Max temp. Amman ... 05/20

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

Aqaba ... 11/24

Deserts ... 04/22

Jordan Valley ... 12/25

Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 19, Aqaba 23 Humidity readings: Amman 40 per cent, Aqaba 42 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:

Dr. Jamal Jbara ... 847351

Dr. Abbas Al-Hakkeu ... 885446

Dr. Arafat Al-Ashhab ... 602507

Dr. Ayman Al-Mutaseb 875748

Firas pharmacy ... 661912

Ferdows pharmacy ... 778336

Al Asena pharmacy ... 637055

Nairoukh pharmacy ... 623672

Al Salam pharmacy ... 636730

Yacoub pharmacy ... 644945

Shmeisani pharmacy ... 637660

Najib pharmacy ... 847632

IRBID:

Dr. Mazen Abu Baker ... 552206

Al Quds pharmacy ... 552206

ZARQA:

Dr. Hilal Al Sayyed ... 986762

Khalifeh pharmacy ... 985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre ... 637111

Civil Defence Department ... 661111

Civil Defence Immediate Rescue ... 630341

Civil Defence Emergency ... 199

Rescue Police ... 192, 621111, 637777

Fire Brigade ... 617101

Blood Bank ... 775121

Highway Police ... 843402

Traffic Police ... 896390

Public Security Dept. ... 630321

Hotel Complaints ... 605800

Price Complaints ... 661176

Water & Sewerage Complaints ... 897467

Amman Municipality Complaints ... 787111

Telephone Information (directory assistance) ... 121

Overseas Calls ... 010230

Central Amman Telephone ... 623101

Repairs ... 623101

Abdali Tel. Repairs ... 661101

Jordan Television ... 773111

Radio Jordan ... 774111

Water Authority ... 680100

J. Electricity Authority ... 815615

Electric Power Co. ... 636381

RJ Flight Information ... 08-53200

Queen Alia Intl. Airport 08-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:

Husseini Medical Centre ... 813813/2

Khalidi Maternity ... 644281/6

Akileh Maternity ... 642441/2

Jabal Amman Maternity ... 642362

Malhas, J. Amman ... 636140

Palestine, Shmeisani ... 607071

Shmeisani Hospital ... 669131

University Hospital ... 845845

Al-Muasher Hospital ... 6672279

The Islamic, Abdali ... 66612637

Al-Ahli, Abdali ... 6641646

Al-Bashir ... 775111/26

Al-Muhajreen ... 777101/3

Army, Madra ... 891611/15

Queen Alia Hospital ... 60224030

Amal Hospital ... 674155

The Arab Centre for Heart and ... 865199

Special Surgery ... 865199

ZARQA:

Zarqa Govt. Hospital ... 09983323

Zarqa National Hospital ... 09900560

Im Sina Hospital ... 09986732

Al Hikma Modern Hospital ... 09990990

IRBID:

Princess Basma Hospital ... 02127555

Greek Catholic Hospital ... 02127275

Ibn Al Nafes Hospital ... 021247100

AQABA:

Princess Haya Hospital ... 03131411

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

This information is supplied by

Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. 08153200-5, where it should always be verified. Information on other flights can be supplied on phone 08 (52700)

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights

08:15 ... Bombay (RJ)

08:35 ... Jeddah (RJ)

09:15 ... Dhahran, Riyadh (RJ)

09:50 ... Dubai, Abu Dhabi (RJ)

10:05 ... Beirut (RJ)

10:15 ... Doha, Bahrain (RJ)

17:05 ... Brussels, Paris (RJ)

17:45 ... Madrid, Geneva (RJ)

17:45 ... London (RJ)

18:00 New York, Amsterdam (RJ)

18:10 ... Athens (RJ)

18:40 ... Frankfurt (RJ)

19:30 ... Tunis (RJ)

21:55 ... Rome, Vienna (RJ)

23:59 ... Cairo (RJ)

Other Flights

06:20 ... Tel Aviv (LY)

12:40 ... Bahrain (GF)

15:20 ... Moscow (SU)

20:10 ... Beirut (ME)

20:30 ... Cairo (MS)

23:10 ... Istanbul (TK)

23:50 ... London, Beirut (BA)

01:25 ... Amsterdam, Beirut (KL)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights

09:20 ... Aqaba (RW)

18:55 ... Tel Aviv (RW)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights

06:20 ... Beirut (RJ)

08:40 ... Frankfurt (RJ)

11:00 ... Tunis (RJ)

11:15 ... Rome, Vienna (RJ)

11:30 ... Vienna (RJ)

11:30 Amsterdam, New York (RJ)

12:15 ... London (RJ)

12:20 ... Athens (RJ)

16:25 ... Bangkok (add) (RJ)

20:00 Abu Dhabi, Kuala Lumpur (add) (RJ)

20:00 ... Jakarta (RJ)

20:10 ... Cairo (RJ)

20:30 ... New Delhi (RJ)

20:30 ... Jeddah (RJ)

20:40 ... Damascus (RJ)

21:00 ... Dubai (RJ)

22:10 ... Singapore, Jakarta (RJ)

22:45 ... Bangkok (RJ)

23:25 ... Sanaa (RJ)

Other Flights

06:30 ... London (KJ)

07:00 ... Beirut (ME)

07:15 ... Tel Aviv (LY)

07:35 ... Damascus, London (BA)

13:30 ... Doha (GF)

16:35 ... Moscow (SU)

21:25 ... Cairo (MS)

02:30 ... Amsterdam (KL)

06:00 ... Istanbul (TK)

Royal Wing (RW) Flights

09:50 Aqaba (RW) (departing from Marka Airport)

20:30 ... Aqaba (RW)

HILAZ RAILWAY TRAIN

Dep. Amman ... 8:00 a.m. every Monday

Dep. Damascus ... 5:00 p.m. every Monday

Dep. Damascus ... 7:30 a.m. every Sunday

Dep. Amman ... 5:00 p.m. every Sunday

MARKET PRICES

Upper/lower price in fils per kg.

Apple ... 700/500

Banana ... 550/550

Banana (imported) ... 950/700

Cabbage ... 60/40

Carrot ... 280/150

Cauliflower ... 180/140

Cucumber (large) ... 160/100

Cucumber (small) ... 250/180

Eggplant ... 150/80

Garlic ... 1000/750

Grape fruit ... 160/80

Lemon ... 390/250

Marrow (large) ... 150/80

Marrow (small) ... 200/120

Onion (green) ... 180/140

Onion (dry) ... 200/120

Orange ... 580/400

Peas ... 900/600

Pepper (hot) ... 280/150

Pepper (sweet) ... 300/150

Potato ... 260/120

Spinach ... 140/80

String Bean ... 600/400

Tomato ... 200/100



Princess Basma initiates Ramadan

WADI ARABA (Petra) — HRH Princess Basma Saturday visited the Wadi Araba region in southern Jordan and met with local residents of six villages and settlements at the start of a month-long campaign aimed to provide aid to the needy.

She donated JD 5,000 to a fund which grants loans to needy families and JD 200 to promote regional social and children's services.

During her visit, the princess met with village residents of Rishch, Raitch, Qatir, Khushbeih, Bu Maqour and Qureiqra, expressed her delight at the annual fund-raising charity campaign designed to collect donations to be distributed to the needy.

NEWS IN

House to convene today

AMMAN (Petra) — The Lower House will convene today in the chairmanship of the Speaker, Mr. Nayef Al-Faraj, to discuss the annual budget and the Ma'an Municipality committee.

Ministry to take part in

AMMAN (Petra) — Minister of Education and Higher Education, Mr. Nayef Al-Faraj, will participate in the conference of Arab Ministers of Education, held in Tunis, January 23rd. The conference will review Arab cultural activities and activities of Arab countries.

Students visit QAF centre

PETRA (J.T.) — A group of students and teachers from Britain and Jordan are taking part in a 12-day tour of Jordan. They visited the Queen Alia International (QAF) centre at Taybeh and were acquainted with its services. The group was briefed by the programmes for child care and women's contributions and handicrafts.

WHAT'S G

CONCERT

* Performance by Al-Hannouni at the Royal Cultural Centre at 8 p.m.

* Performance, sponsored by the Ministry of Education, at the Royal Cultural Centre at 8 p.m.

EXHIBITION

* Photographic exhibition on Pakistan at Qaid-e-Azam Hall, Jhal Weibdeh (Tel. 622787, 624787).

* Works by contemporary Arab artists at Darul Al-Funun (Tel. 643251/2), until Feb. 27.

* Works by Jordanian artists at the Ministry of Education, until Jan. 30.

* Works of small paintings by artists at Baladna Art Gallery, Garden, Jan. 14.

* Works by Spanish painter, Cervantes, Jabal Amman until Jan. 14.

* Works by ten contemporary artists at the Gallery of Fine Arts (open daily), Jan. 12.

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During the last three years thousands of migrant workers from Romania, Thailand, Poland, the Philippines and China have been allowed into Israel to replace Palestinians barred from teaching their jobs in the Jewish state by the intermittent closing of the Palestinian territories for security reasons.

About 100,000 immigrants have work permits, and it is estimated that there are at least another 100,000 illegal foreign workers in Israel.

Internal Security Minister Avi Golan said the poll showed Israeli concern with the issue of security, but he added that the government needed to look in the long-term interests of the country.



Princess Basma initiates Ramadan campaign in Wadi Araba. The campaign is aimed to provide aid to the needy (Petra photo)

Princess initiates Ramadan campaign

WADI ARABA (Petra) — HRH Princess Basma Saturday visited the Wadi Araba region in southern Jordan and met with local inhabitants of six villages and settlements at the start of a month-long campaign aimed to provide aid to the needy.

She donated JD 5,000 to a fund which grants loans to indigent families and JD 2,000 to promote regional social and children's services.

During her visit, the Princess met with village residents of Rishah, Rahme, Qatir, Khuseibeh, Bir Madkour and Qureigra, expressed her delight at the annual fund-raising charity campaign designed to collect donations to be distributed to indigent families during the Holy Month of Ramadan.

In an address to residents gathered at Rishah, the Princess said that the annual collection is a national campaign aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of less fortunate communities and she stressed that the campaign was an embodiment of Ramadan and the teachings of Islam.

The Princess also stated that the campaign manifests social solidarity and serves on the part of the Queen Alia Fund for Social Development (QAF) which is sponsoring the campaign, to help needy families begin income-generating projects in order to combat poverty and unemployment.

Last week, Princess Basma announced the formation of a higher committee to carry out the Ramadan Charity Campaign, which has succeeded in providing assistance to 31,211 needy families around the country in the past few years.

The donations, which are being collected by voluntary groups during the month of Ramadan, is given in cash or in-kind assistance to finance vocational training courses for the heads of the poor families and to enable them to earn a living and help people requiring special attention.

Following a meeting, also Saturday, with Head of the

Environment of Committee of Parliament Fawzi Tuqmei.

The Italian delegation headed by Prof. Braghetto agreed to file feasibility studies, reports and regulations for the protection of the environment successfully implemented in Veneto.

The first comprehensive legislation for the protection and the conservation of the environment in Veneto was endorsed in 1978, and was progressively improved and updated so that today it represents one of the most advanced and conforms strictly to EU directives," Prof. Braghetto stated.

Regarding the agreement, 15 Jordanian youths, winners of the annual contest on environmental protection issues, organised by the FES, will visit the Veneto region hosted by different environmental organisations.

The agreement also stipulates that two scholarships be granted to young Jordanian scholars "for the purpose of updating them on environmental matters."

From the talks held with his Jordanian counterparts, two issues emerged as crucial, Prof. Braghetto said.

"The first point was that promoting environmental protection and conservation means improving the quality of life of the local communities," he said.

"The second key issue upon which we agreed is that the environment represents a global emergency as a direct consequence of modernisation and industrialisation processes," Prof. Braghetto continued.

To reach sustainable development, in which economic growth is not achieved at the expense of the environment, but proceeds hand in hand with nature conservation, governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and citizens must promote awareness and information campaigns, educate younger generations on the issue, develop adequate technology and encourage the exchange of knowledge as well as provide a legislative framework for the environmental protection, Prof. Braghetto said.

In terms of Jordan, Prof. Braghetto pointed to the problem of a high population concentration over a limited area.

According to official statistics, 1.4 million out of a total population of over 4 million reside within the boundaries of the Greater Amman Municipality.

"Like many other European regions, Veneto has, and is still suffering from, the problem of the desertification of rural and mountainous areas," Prof. Braghetto said, adding that "in this, as in other regards, Jordan can learn from our mistakes."

Jordan's Environment Law, became effective as of the beginning of 1995 subsequent to endorsement by the Upper and Lower Houses of Parliament at the end of 1994, establishes the General Corporation for the Protection of the Environment (GCPE), which

"seeks to coordinate efforts among all governmental and non-governmental bodies tackling environmental issues," Mr. Dabbas said.

The GCPE Board of Directors includes the under-secretaries of all ministries, except the Ministry of Tourism, the presidents of three Jordanian NGOs dealing with the protection and conservation of the environment - President of the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature Anis Mousasher, President of Jordanian Environmental Society Ahmad Obaidat, and President of the Society for the Deforestation and Protection of the Badia Abdullahi Arabiat - as well as three independent experts, among which Mr. Dabbas is counted.

The GCPE is the highest official body in charge of establishing all regulations on environmental issues, from standards of gas emissions to rules for industrial complexes, Mr. Dabbas explained.

Praising Jordan's Environment Law, Veneto's General Secretary for Public Health and Social Affairs Franco Toniolo said that "the unification of all associations and institutions dealing with environmental issues (as provided by the Jordan's Environment Law) in a single national agency boosts coordination and facilitates drafting and implementing comprehensive health and environmental policies at the national and regional levels."

Stressing the need for tackling environmental issues at a regional level, Mr. Dabbas pointed out that the FES was "among the first to take a group of Jordanian youths to Israel and initiate a dialogue and joint initiatives on the environment."

Annex IV of the 1994 Jordanian-Israeli Peace Treaty is dedicated to the environment and provides for bilateral cooperation in the fields of environmental legislation and standards, research and applied technology, air quality control, marine environment, waste management including hazardous waste, and combating desertification while promoting public awareness and environmental education.

Counting more than 80 members, the FES recently stipulated an agreement with the U.S.-based Globe Programme.

The programme, in which more than 40 countries take part worldwide, connects students via the Internet and gives them the opportunity to exchange views on the environment and consult directly with scientists from the U.S. space agency, NASA, and other top agencies operating in similar fields. Mr. Dabbas said.

Jordan finds environmental ally in Veneto, Italy

By Francesca Ciriaci
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — With yesterday's signing of a bilateral declaration of intent "to foster socio-cultural exchanges on health and environmental policies," Jordan has found in the Italian region of Veneto a keen and qualified partner to develop environmental legislation and implement measures aimed at the conservation of the Kingdom's precious natural patrimony.

The agreement, signed by Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs Abdul Razak Tubeishat and President of the Friends of the Environment Society (FES) Ra'uf Dabbas on behalf of Jordan, and by Veneto's Regional Minister for Public Health and the Environment Iles Braghetto, represents "a valid instrument to exchange experiences and know-how on environmental issues, and especially air and water pollution," Prof. Braghetto told the Jordan Times in an interview.

Veneto, the large and populous north-western Italian district, which includes the city of Venice, parts of the Alps as well as the fertile plains degrading to the Adriatic Sea and registers one of the highest per capita incomes in the European Union (EU), can provide Jordan with an almost twenty-year experience in environmental legislation and regulations, Prof. Braghetto stated.

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In terms of Jordan, Prof. Braghetto pointed to the problem of a high population concentration over a limited area.

According to official statistics, 1.4 million out of a total population of over 4 million reside within the boundaries of the Greater Amman Municipality.

"Like many other European regions, Veneto has, and is still suffering from, the problem of the desertification of rural and mountainous areas," Prof. Braghetto said, adding that "in this, as in other regards, Jordan can learn from our mistakes."

Jordan's Environment Law, became effective as of the beginning of 1995 subsequent to endorsement by the Upper and Lower Houses of Parliament at the end of 1994, establishes the General Corporation for the Protection of the Environment (GCPE), which

"seeks to coordinate efforts among all governmental and non-governmental bodies tackling environmental issues," Mr. Dabbas said.

The GCPE Board of Directors includes the under-secretaries of all ministries, except the Ministry of Tourism, the presidents of three Jordanian NGOs dealing with the protection and conservation of the environment - President of the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature Anis Mousasher, President of Jordanian Environmental Society Ahmad Obaidat, and President of the Society for the Deforestation and Protection of the Badia Abdullahi Arabiat - as well as three independent experts, among which Mr. Dabbas is counted.

The GCPE is the highest official body in charge of establishing all regulations on environmental issues, from standards of gas emissions to rules for industrial complexes, Mr. Dabbas explained.

Praising Jordan's Environment Law, Veneto's General Secretary for Public Health and Social Affairs Franco Toniolo said that "the unification of all associations and institutions dealing with environmental issues (as provided by the Jordan's Environment Law) in a single national agency boosts coordination and facilitates drafting and implementing comprehensive health and environmental policies at the national and regional levels."

Stressing the need for tackling environmental issues at a regional level, Mr. Dabbas pointed out that the FES was "among the first to take a group of Jordanian youths to Israel and initiate a dialogue and joint initiatives on the environment."

Annex IV of the 1994 Jordanian-Israeli Peace Treaty is dedicated to the environment and provides for bilateral cooperation in the fields of environmental legislation and standards, research and applied technology, air quality control, marine environment, waste management including hazardous waste, and combating desertification while promoting public awareness and environmental education.

Counting more than 80 members, the FES recently stipulated an agreement with the U.S.-based Globe Programme.

The programme, in which more than 40 countries take part worldwide, connects students via the Internet and gives them the opportunity to exchange views on the environment and consult directly with scientists from the U.S. space agency, NASA, and other top agencies operating in similar fields. Mr. Dabbas said.

IN BRIEF

audi murder case — report

Charles is expected to face charges accused in Saudi Arabia of colleague when he visits the report said here Saturday. The drumming up British business of the case of a 10-year-old Deborah Smith is like Daily Mail said senior British a confident that Prince Charles a he meets the Saudi royal family nurses are set to visit them in men's wing of a prison in the Stan and Ann McLaughlin are with members of Ms. Pamy's two nurses could face the death law in Saudi Arabia. Mr. Mary are accused of stabbing to Clifford on Dec. 11 at the King in eastern Dhahran. Both onessons, saying they were Their allegations have been Minister Prince Nayef.

64 prisoners

the Sheikh Hamud Ben Khalid the release of 64 prisoners start of the Islamic month of The amnesty did not cover politicians, they added. Qura began today.

Idower's pension

A Israeli homosexual has won a widow's pension after the death in the Israeli army, military rules. The army had refused to grant after the death of his partner arguing that pension rights did not apply. But a Tel Aviv court ruled in favour of the soldier's widow as his partner was his first sexual partner to go to court. Mr. Dror said, adding that precedent for other public employees, who have been fighting for several years, for the advance for the rights of male

02:30	Amman-Jordan
06:00	Royal Wing (RW) Flight
09:50	Amman-Jordan
20:30	Amman-Jordan

IRRAJ RAILWAY TRAIN

Exp. Amman	06:00
Exp. Jordan	06:30
Exp. Amman	07:00
Exp. Jordan	07:30

MARKET PRICES

Exp. Amman	06:00
Exp. Jordan	06:30
Exp. Amman	07:00
Exp. Jordan	07:30

NEWS IN BRIEF

House to convene today

AMMAN (Petra) — The Lower House of Parliament will today convene under the chairmanship of Speaker Saad Haysel Srour. Parliament will refer draft laws regarding tourism and the Ma'an Municipality Court to various sub-committees.

Ministry to take part in culture seminar

AMMAN (Petra) — Minister of Culture Ahmad Qudab and Ministry Secretary General Qassem Abu Ein will participate in the conference of Arab Ministers of Culture to be held in Tunis, January 23rd through the 28th. The conference will review Arab cultural projects and means of activating cultural activities among Arab countries.

Students visit QAF centre

PETRA (J.T.) — A group of 65 post-graduate students and teachers from Britain and the United States, currently taking part in a 12-day workshop entitled "Tourism Development of Vernacular Architecture of South Jordan", Saturday visited the Queen Alia Fund for Social Development (QAF) centre at Taybeh in the Wadi Mousa district and were acquainted with its services to the local communities. The group was briefed by centre officials regarding the programmes for child care as well as promoting local women's contributions and handicrafts.

WHAT'S GOING ON

CONCERTS

Performance by Al Hananah Band of Popular Art at the Royal Cultural Centre at 8:00 p.m.

Performance, sponsored by the Association of Art and Heritage, at the Royal Cultural Centre at 8:00 p.m.

EXHIBITIONS

Photographic exhibition on the life of the Founder of Jordan at Qaid-e-Azzam Hall, Embassy of Pakistan, Weibdeh (Tel. 622787, 624680), until January 31.

Works by contemporary Arab artists entitled "The New Vision" at Darul Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh, (Tel. 623172), until Feb. 27.

Works by Jordanian artists at the Royal Cultural Centre until Jan. 30.

Works of small paintings by Jordanian and Arab artists at Baladna Art Gallery, Gardens St. (Tel. 687598), until Jan. 14.

Works by Spanish painter Clara Amado at Instituto Cervantes, Jabal Amman until Jan. 15.

Works by ten contemporary Indonesian artists entitled "On Scripts to Abstraction" at the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts (open daily except Tuesdays), until Jan. 12.

Minister denies allegations of increased rates for Iraqi oil exports

AMMAN (J.T.) — Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Hashem Dabbas Saturday denied reports alleging that Iraq has demanded that oil exports to Jordan be paid for at international rates.

He affirmed that oil imports from Iraq will continue at the rate of 12,000 tonnes a day.

Under a special deal, Iraq continues to sell Jordan crude oil at the rate of \$15.25 per barrel, at a time when crude oil sells at \$25 a barrel on international markets.

Dr. Dabbas, accompanied by Minister of Finance Marwan Awad, visited Iraq last week for trade talks and described the visit and trade negotiations, including those of oil shipments to Jordan as

successful by all standards.

"Jordan's needs for crude oil and oil products were discussed and a trade protocol on oil imports was renewed," Mr. Dabbas said, adding that the two sides also agreed to exchange expertise on oil-related matters and discussed joint Iraqi-Jordanian projects.

"The talks between Jordanian and Iraqi officials were held in a very cordial atmosphere," stated the minister, who noted that a Jordanian delegation is annually making visits to Baghdad to negotiate the oil quantity the Kingdom requires.

Jordan continues to sell food and medicine to Iraq and hopes to increase exports in the light of a

recent UN decision to allow Baghdad to sell \$2 billion worth of oil to buy medicine and food.

In November last year, Jordan agreed to an Iraqi request for \$35 million worth of urgently needed goods.

According to Jordanian officials, the agreement came subsequent to bilateral talks held in Amman and stated that the \$35 million came in addition to a 1996 trade protocol under which Jordan supplied Baghdad with \$200 million worth of food and medicine, exempt from stringent UN trade sanctions.

These sanctions were imposed on Iraq after its 1990 invasion of Kuwait. Jordan reduced the volume of the protocol to \$200 million in 1996,

from its figure of \$400 million in 1995, and said that the cut back was prompted when Iraq could no longer afford to pay the foreign exchange needed to pay for the Jordanian goods, from its own reserves.

According to Jordanian figures, Baghdad now owes the Kingdom more than \$1.2 billion which has accumulated since 1990.

Furthermore, Jordan has received assurances from Iraqi officials that Iraqi leadership favours using Aqaba as the main port for its imports after the Iraqi port of Umm Qasr.

Referring to a recent agreement on technical cooperation between the HIC and the nearby Jordan University of Science and Technology (JUST), Mr. Hijazi asserted that the deal stipulates that JUST establish an advisory centre at the industrial site with the purpose of

approximately 18 per cent of repeaters and drop-outs. He calculated the yearly education cost per student at JD 129, and the cost of the whole basic cycle of a non-repeating student at JD 1,290.

All extra expenditure required by the repeaters is simply educational loss, Mr. Haj said.

If the cost of education ratio of 14 per cent out of the state budget is considered "acceptable even in industrialised countries," as Crown Prince Hassan mentioned in his opening speech to ICET conference, its conversion into an efficient educational system should be improved by more rigorous capital administration in each department of the Ministry of Education, transparent planning and simplified bureaucracy in the Ministry and in universities, Mr. Khatib suggested.

Any raise in teachers' salary should also reflect their professional and pedagogical formation, he underlined, which does not contravene the necessity of offering higher financial and social esteem to the career of teaching in Jordan.

For such reasons, the budgets allocated to teacher education were not exhausted and at the end of the fiscal year, the rest automatically flowed back into the global state budget, causing actual financial loss in education, he added.

Another source of educational waste, analysed by Mr. Haj in a study regarding educational efficiency, student flow and cost of education, is found in the partial efficiency of the adopted educational system and it is expressed in a high percentage of repeaters and drop-outs. Mr. Haj studied the 1985-94 period and estimated a percentage of

the cost for elementary education per student for the years 1985-94 was estimated at an average of JD 129 per year (according to a study completed by a retired ministry official). The Ministry of Education figures for 1994-95 broke down as follows: JD 149 per year for an elementary school student, JD 241 per year for an academic secondary school student and JD 575 for a vocational secondary school student.

According to the ministry, the government budget for teachers' salaries has increased by approximately JD 1.5 million annually.

The sum of JD 170 million represented the 1996 budget envelope for the salaries of the 60,000 teachers of the Kingdom (i.e. a third of the total working population).

A full fifty per cent of these 60,000 teachers lack academic preparation and 35 per cent of the total have no post-graduate pedagogical training, according to a recent study done by Dr. Ahmad Khatib at Yarmouk University.

The 1996 ministry's teacher training budget of JD 1,048,000 comprised JD 200,000 for trainers' salaries, JD 260,000 for bachelor degree scholar-

ships and JD 120,000 for post-graduate scholarships (books and transportation included) and JD 86,000 for equipment and other administrative and organisational expenditures, according to teacher training department registers at the Ministry of Education.

The efficiency of the teacher training programme, adopted in 1987 was estimated at as low as 10 per cent in the above-mentioned study. Bureaucratic impediments and planning confusion obstructed the completion of the programme, Dr. Khatib said.

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Al Hassan Industrial City predicts major expansion

RAMTHA (Petra) — Director of the Al Hassan Industrial City (HIC), near Ramtha, Walid Hijazi, Saturday said that he expects the number of factories and workers employed on the premises to double by the end of 1997 due to current expansions.

At present, the HIC houses 56 industrial firms, established with a capital of JD 57 million and employing 1,700 workers, he said.

Mr. Hijazi said that basic services and an integrated infrastructure which includes roads, electricity, water and other services were instrumental in attracting investors.

He said that the HIC will add 500 dunums to the existing 427 dunoms which were first carved out to establish the estate in 1991.

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Algeria to hold parliamentary elections in May, paper reports

PARIS (Agencies) — Algerian voters will elect a multi-party national assembly in May, with local elections following in the second half of the year, the government-controlled newspaper *Al Moudjahid* said Saturday.

President Liamine Zeroual, who promised parliamentary elections in the first half of 1997, summoned the government-appointed Transitional National Council, a quasi-parliament, to meet in extraordinary session to vote election laws on Jan. 25.

The government, which has not yet announced an official date for the elections, drafted a law setting the number of deputies in the National Assembly at 380.

According to the constitution adopted last November, the National Assembly and the National Council (upper house) form the parliament.

Two thirds of the National Council's 144 members will be picked by the elected local authorities while the 96 others will be appointed by the president from the ranks of leading personalities, union officials and other professionals.

Algeria has been without an elected parliament and local councils since January 1992 when the authorities scrapped a general election in which the now outlawed radical Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) had taken a commanding lead.

The annulment plunged the North African country into violence pitting Muslim guerrillas and government forces in which about 60,000 have died.

Meanwhile, suspected Muslim guerrillas in Algeria shot and killed a driver working for the government-controlled newspaper *Al Moudjahid*, the newspaper said Saturday.

Bellache Messaoud was shot dead Friday night outside his home in Bajarrah district south of Algiers, *Al Moudjahid* said.

The newspaper blamed the killing on Muslim guerrillas. More than 60 journalists and media workers have been killed in the past three years in attacks blamed on Muslim rebels who accuse journalists of backing the government.

In Washington, a report commissioned by the U.S. army said the current rulers of Algeria lack popular support and Islamic fundamentalist parties eventually will seize power.

The report, prepared by the Rand Corp., a government-financed think tank, said strife in Algeria will not end until genuine parliamentary elections are held involving all significant political parties.

While the United States has limited influence in Algeria, it can help forge a Western consensus about "creating a process... that would restore the prospects for free elections and open a way to end the conflict," said the study, released Friday.

The FIS, which stands for Islamic Salvation Front in French, can't be excluded if national and social reconciliation is to come about, the report said. The FIS was the single biggest winner in elections held in 1991 but the results were annulled by the Algerian army.

"Algeria is in agony, caught up in a four-year paralysing spiral of violence that has almost brought the state to its knees," the Rand analysts said. "The regime seems determined to reject parliamentary elections as long as the FIS stands a chance of gaining a dominant — or even major — voice in the government."

If President Liamine Zeroual does not move his country toward national elections, Algeria will remain "condemned to continuing widespread violence, paralysis and radicalisation of its political forces," their report said.

While sharing power carries risk, the alternatives are worse, the study concludes.

An FIS government "may be congenial to the West, but is unlikely to fundamentally threaten Western interests," the report said. "If legally elected, it will be under strong constraints to leave power if not reelected for a second term — as it has promised to do."

The report called the current Algerian government "intellectually and politically bankrupt," saying it offers effective solution to the country's problems "except to hold onto power through force and hope for better times."

The Algerian people lack housing, jobs and social services. Political violence was relatively limited before the 1991 elections, but the FIS has been resorting to such tactics more recently because of the military's efforts to wipe it out through force and with mass arrests, the report said.

"Since 1992, the spiral of violence has risen dramatically — as much as 50,000 dead on both sides in a brutal and bloody confrontation. It will be difficult to stop the logic of events that is leading to the government's increasing marginalisation, loss of support and eventual collapse," the report said.

Afghan Taleban undecided on attending U.N. truce talks

KABUL (Agencies) — The fundamentalist Islamic Taleban have not yet decided if they will attend international truce talks organised by the United Nations in the Pakistani capital Islamabad.

"So far we have not finalised our decision. I have not been informed officially if we will attend the talks," Sber Abbas Stanakzai, deputy foreign minister in the Taleban administration, told Reuters Saturday.

The talks, organised by United Nations Special Representative to Afghanistan Norbert Holm, were scheduled to start on Jan. 13.

However, Mr. Stanakzai did not rule out the Taleban attending the talks.

"There are still two days left until the talks are scheduled to start — a decision will be made before then," he said.

There have already been two rounds of talks, one in the northern Afghan city of Mazar-i-Sharif and one in Islamabad.

Monday's talks, described by the United Nations as "technical level discussions", were to involve three members of the Taleban and three members of the opposition.

The Taleban are facing an opposition alliance consisting of the ousted government, northern leader General Abdul Rashid Dostum and Shi'ite leader Kaim Khalili on frontlines some 40 kilometres north of Kabul and in Afghanistan's remote northwestern provinces.

Mr. Stanakzai said if the Taleban did decide to attend the talks, the agenda would be limited to discussing a ceasefire and an exchange of prisoners of war.

"We will talk about a ceasefire and an exchange of prisoners, but nothing further until these have been established. The ceasefire and prisoner exchange should be done first and then we can discuss other problems," Mr. Stanakzai said.

"We have already discussed the release of prisoners of war and a ceasefire in previous meetings, but they have not been put in place so far," said Mr. Stanakzai Saturday morning.

"We are ready to go anywhere for peaceful negotiations if we feel the meeting can bring some result," he said.

Mr. Stanakzai also said the Taleban would be sending delegations to the United States and Iran for discussions.

"In the very near future a delegation will go to the United States to discuss different issues with the government over there."

He said the delegation would consist of two members of the Taleban's ruling council, Wakil Ahmad and Abdul Hakim Mujahid, and Minister for Refugees Maulawi Abdul Rakhib.

Mr. Stanakzai said the delegation's visit was a Taleban initiative, but that the United States authorities had been informed.

He also said that the Taleban's Foreign Minister Mullah Mohammad Ghous would visit Tehran in response to an Iranian invitation.

"Mullah Ghous will visit Iran in the near future at their request," said Mr. Stanakzai.

Relations between the Taleban administration and Iran are strained. The Taleban accuse Iran of helping the opposition alliance materially and politically, an accusation that both Iran and the opposition deny.

Meanwhile, former Pakistani Interior Minister Naseerullah Babar said Saturday the dismissal of Benazir Bhutto's government by President Farooq Ahmed Khan Leghari had hampered peace efforts in Afghanistan.

"When I was involved in the Afghanistan peace process, we almost clinched an agreement on a ceasefire between the Taleban and other groups," he said in an interview.

"The Taleban were flexible and had our government remained in power, there would have been peace in Afghanistan," Mr. Babar, who headed a shuttle mission between the warring factions, added.

Mr. Babar said two days before the sacking of the government on Nov. 5, he had a five-hour meeting on Afghanistan with Mr. Leghari who told him to go to Afghanistan.

"But obviously I could not go because our government was dismissed," he said.

Mr. Babar, during a peace mission to Afghanistan following the Sept. 27 capture of Kabul by the Islamic Taleban militia, tried to bring about an agreement between the militia and Gen. Dostum.

A retired major general, Mr. Babar was believed to have masterminded the creation of the Taleban Islamic Movement which emerged from Koranic schools in November 1994.

The militia went on to seize control of two-thirds of Afghanistan vowing to establish peace and security under strict Islamic Sharia Law.

"We've tried to break the anti-Taleban alliance. Pakistan has never interfered in their internal affairs. But as friends we keep on assisting them to come to an understanding," Mr. Babar claimed.

"We never wanted the division of Afghanistan on ethnic lines as there are Uzbeks, Tajiks, Pushtoons and others. There should be a unified state which also favours us."

Himself a Pushtoon, Mr. Babar said he favoured Taleban control in Afghanistan, adding the country should have a federal structure with representation to every province.

He said the rise of Taleban was of "great advantage" to Pakistan. "This is the first time there is a government which has no links with India or anybody else," he said.

Pakistan used to accuse the ousted Afghan government of being an ally of its arch rival India.

Two smaller agreements were also signed including a 50 million yen grant to help build a planetarium and 37.9 million yen for equipment for the Vietnam Musicology Institute.

After the ceremony Mr. Hashimoto went in for talks with the Vietnamese premier. He was later due to meet Communist Party General Secretary Do Muoi.

The documents were signed by Japanese Ambassador Katsunari Suzuki and members of the Vietnamese government.

But serious problems including unemployment and an expanding current account deficit remained, it said, despite success in bringing inflation under control and boosting agricultural production.

The Japanese Foreign Ministry acknowledged in a statement the progress made by Vietnam since it began its Doi Moi reform policy in 1986.

Renegade Tajik commander heads for barracks

DUSHANBE (R) — A renegade Tajik government commander and his troops are on their way back to barracks after the president ordered them to halt their attack on a rival warlord, a presidential spokesman said Saturday.

"They have begun withdrawing their forces from Tursunzade and are on their way back to their base in Kurgan-Tyube," Zafar Saidov, spokesman for Tajik President Imomali Rakhmonov, told Reuters by telephone in the capital Dushanbe.

Colonel Makhmud Khudoyberdiyev, who led an armed rebellion against his president in February last year, sent tanks and troops into Tursunzade, an aluminium producing town 45 kilometres west of Dushanbe, last week to unseat a rival warlord.

Mr. Rakhmonov ordered the commander back to barracks, declaring his actions "illegal" but it took Col. Khudoyberdiyev several days to follow the order.

Mr. Saidov said Mr. Rakhmonov would make a "statement to the people" on the events in Tursunzade later Saturday.

While the standoff between commander and president appears to have been defused, diplomats say the incident shows Mr. Rakhmonov's grip on the country weakening.

They say it also threatens delicate peace talks aimed at ending a bloody four-year civil war between the government and forces of the Islamic opposition in the mountainous former Soviet republic bordering Afghanistan and China.

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Bulgarian opposition protesters storm the doors of the parliament building in Sofia Friday, demanding early parliamentary elections. Nationwide protests organised by the opposition Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), are in their fifth day. UDF deputies Friday walked out of parliament after the ruling Socialists rejected a vote on their "salvation declaration," which called for early parliamentary elections (Reuters photo)

Bulgarian president holds crisis talks

SOFIA (R) — Bulgarian riot police used clubs to break up a 10-hour opposition siege of parliament early Saturday in the worst violence in the country since the collapse of one-party Communist rule.

But within hours of the police action, protesters and security forces clashed again outside Sofia's parliament building. A reporter inside the building said police were using batons to disperse 500 protesters. Police reinforcements were arriving.

The confrontation, spurred by acute economic crisis, came after the governing Socialist Party refused to vote Friday on a motion calling for fresh elections. The opposition Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) walked out and urged a nationwide strike and civil disobedience.

What began with a human chain around the parliament building turned into a virtual siege, trapping Socialist deputies inside. The demonstrators broke windows in the parliament and smashed and overturned cars with deputies had parked outside. The vote took place as clouds of teargas billowed into the building.

In the early hours of Saturday the police moved in using clubs and firing blank cartridges to beat a path into the parliament and allow the Socialist deputies out.

Bulgarian News Agency (BTA) said 97 people were injured, including 35 civilians, among them two UDF parliamentary deputies, four security guards from parliament and eight police.

Hours later about 500 opposition supporters began a fresh rally outside Sofia's gold-domed cathedral.

Representatives of the opposition and the ruling party met President Zhelyu Zhelev, who said Friday he would not ask the ruling Socialists to form a new government.

But clashes broke out outside the presidency. A government statement ordered the interior minister to take all necessary measures "to guarantee the security of strategic sites and the normal functioning of the country's institutions."

Mr. Zhelev, who said he sympathised with the protesters but could not condone violence, had been expected to summon Interior Minister Nikolai Dobrev, the Socialists' nominee for prime minister, to give him a mandate to form a new government following the Dec. 21 resignation of Zhan Videnov.

The Socialists are half way through their parliamentary term but have lost a great deal of authority as the economy worsens.

A quarter of Bulgaria's banks are in receivership and triple-digit inflation has slashed real incomes.

A flight into dollars has pushed the lev from 70 to the dollar to 645 in a year. Annual inflation for 1996 hit 310.8 per cent, the second largest rise since Bulgaria began market reforms in 1990.

Voters delivered a powerful no-confidence vote two months ago by electing opposition lawyer Petar Stoyanov as president with 60 per cent of the vote. He will be sworn in on Jan. 19.

As soon as parliament approves a new cabinet, the International Monetary Fund plans to negotiate implementation of a tough fixed exchange rate as a last resort to restore confidence in the crumbling economy.

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Political turmoil over Gingrich intensifies

WASHINGTON (R) — Political turmoil over ethics charges against House of Representatives Speaker Newt Gingrich intensified Friday as Republicans demanded an investigation of the taping of a private Gingrich phone call and Democrats said cancellation of next week's public hearings on the affair violated House rules.

The Democrats said the House parliamentarian had confirmed that the rules did not permit Ethics Committee Chairman Nancy Johnson, a Connecticut Republican, to scrap the schedule agreed to by the committee.

Ms. Johnson Thursday night had announced she had cancelled the hearings, set by the ethics committee in a meeting lasting nearly 14 hours. Starting Monday they would have set out for the first time on live television full details of the case against Republican Gingrich.

Late Friday the two Democrats on the subcommittee that investigated Mr. Johnson released a letter to Ms. Johnson that said: "The House parliamentarian has confirmed to both you and us that the House rules do not permit you to cancel the agreed-upon committee schedule without agreement from the members of the committee."

"We would expect you to abide by the rules of the House as interpreted by the parliamentarian," Democratic Reps. Ben Cardin of Maryland and Nancy Pelosi of California said.

Ms. Johnson acted after Democrats, angry at being faced with a Jan. 21 deadline set by the House for a vote on the penalty to be imposed on Mr. Gingrich for ethics violations, had publicly attacked the schedule because it did not allow special counsel James Cole to complete his report on the case before Jan. 21.

Democrats said that the House was being rushed to judgment. They wanted the vote delayed, but instead Johnson merely ordered the report produced sooner.

She said the report would now be completed and made public by next Thursday and "following that, we anticipate a public hearing."

It appeared the only day available would be Friday.

Ms. Johnson's move appeared to have trumped Democrats by giving them the report prior to the House vote but taking away the hearings, which were much more important to them.

"If you have to make your choice, clearly the public hearing is the more important process," Mr. Cardin told reporters.

In what amounted to a plea-bargain with the ethics committee which avoided need for a public "trial," Mr. Gingrich admitted last Dec. 21 that he had brought discredit on the House by failing to get legal advice to ensure compliance with a ban on use of tax-exempt funds for possible partisan activity and to have given false information to House investigators.

The Gingrich tape controversy erupted Friday when the New York Times reported on a conversation between the speaker, aides and political allies last Dec. 21, the day he and the Ethics Committee reached agreement on the charges against him.

The newspaper said the tape was made by someone in Florida "unsympathetic to Mr. Gingrich" who overheard the call on a police scanner which picked up a cellular phone transmission. The Times said it had received a transcript of the call from "a Democratic congressman hostile to Mr. Gingrich."

The tape suggested Mr. Gingrich was consulting allies on how to mount a damage-control counterattack against the charges, despite his promise not to do so.

Gen. Lebed, sacked by Mr. Yeltsin for insubordination in October, said the president's new medical setback was turning into a tragedy for the whole country.

Some political rivals have said Mr. Yeltsin should step down and Russian newspapers have taken a gloomy line, expressing doubts over

illness, which has prevented him re-asserting his power fully.

"Of course I cannot say Boris Nikolayevich feels comfortable spiritually," Mr. Mironov told reporters. "Of course this is depressing him, of course his mood is not a very happy one but I see no reason for particular pessimism."

Mr. Mironov ruled out any direct link between pneumonia and the quintuple heart bypass which Mr. Yeltsin had on Nov. 5, as did pioneering U.S. heart surgeon Michael DeBakey who was a consultant to the Russian surgeons who conducted the operation.

But he added that Mr. Yeltsin had been weakened by the operation and should have been admitted to hospital earlier.

The Kremlin has espoused a policy of openness since Yeltsin fell ill. Official statements appear to have been realistic rather than optimistic.

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Workers prepare a sea fence to contain Japan's worst oil spill in Japan's northwestern Japan, in an effort to find out how the accident occurred.

Japan's oil

MIYAKI (AFP) — Japanese Coast Guards battled Sunday to contain Japan's worst oil spill which is threatening several nuclear reactors and has already caused severe environmental damage.

A Maritime Safety Agency official warned the spill was spreading in Tokushima Bay in Fukui prefecture and was expected to hit the coast on the western tip of Shikoku peninsula where seven nuclear reactors are concentrated.

"It is highly likely to reach the coast this time," the official told a news conference. "We have delivered all the information we have to the operators of nuclear power plants."

Kansai Electric Power Co. and two other firms are operating a total of 15 nuclear reactors in Wakasa Bay, some 100 km from Japan's "Nuclear Ban."

A Kansai Electric spokesman has said the company may shut down the reactors "depending on the situation."

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Workers prepare a sea fence to keep Oi nuclear power plant's cooling system free from oil slicks in Oi, a coastal town in northwestern Japan, in the latest danger posed by a spill from ruptured Russian tanker Nadhodka. As one of the worst oil spills in Japan's history spread across a widening swath of coastline, Tokyo officials called on Moscow to find out how the accident happened and detail what it would do to help (Renter photo)

Japan's oil spill threatens nuclear reactors

MIKUNI (AFP) — Japanese Coast Guards battled Saturday to contain Japan's worst-ever oil spill which is threatening several nuclear reactors and has already caused severe environmental damage.

A Maritime Safety Agency (MSA) official warned the "spill was spreading in Wakasa Bay in Fukui prefecture and was expected to hit the coast on the western part of Tsunaga peninsula where seven nuclear reactors are concentrated."

The 13,000-tonne tanker is believed to have lost at least 3,700 tonnes of heavy oil, which has already washed ashore or threatens hundreds of kilometres of coastline, seriously endangering local economies dependent on fishing and tourism.

A belt of oil stretching more than 40 kilometres was spotted by a MSA plane late Friday, and another slick of seven kilometres was found nearby Saturday, MSA officials said.

The spill is expected to reach the northern part of Noto peninsula as early Sunday, while a slick drifting west of Wakasa Bay is threatening to hit the "Amakohashidate" sandbar in Kyoto prefecture, known as one of Japan's three most scenic sites, the officials said.

Efforts to clean up the sea and prevent further pollution continued Saturday, with the MSA and the Self Defence Forces mobilising a total of 37 ships and eight planes in the affected areas.

In the sea off Mikuni, where the tanker's bow is located, MSA officials have set up two barriers stretching 400 metres by 500 metres to prevent further spillage.

Six divers searched the waters around the bow Saturday, but were unable to determine whether oil was still leaking, the officials said.

More than 1,000 volunteers have flocked to Mikuni to help clean up the oil which is endangering marine resources.

"We've received the most offers to help since the Kobe earthquake," said Tsutomu Korenaga, 51, of the Nippon Volunteer Network Active in Disaster, a non-governmental organisation founded after the massive Jan. 17, 1995 quake which

killed thousands and left the city in ruins.

Mr. Korenaga's group, based in Hyogo prefecture in western Japan, is helping coordinate volunteers in oil retrieval work here, the area worst hit by the oil spill.

"I found that Japanese people have a strong interest in environmental problems," he said.

Mikuni town officials said Saturday about 2,500 people were helping the cleanup effort, including 1,000 volunteers.

"I like the sea, and we have often come to Wakasa Bay. We saw a newspaper report and decided to come here," said Chikazu Kiji, a 20-year-old college student from Nara in western Japan who came to Mikuni with his 22-year-old brother Noritaka.

The owner of the Russian tanker has offered full compensation for environmental damage and said it was ready to lease special clean-up vessels and send them to Japan from Vladivostok and Sakhalin in the Russian Far East.

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Serbian government gives ground in election crisis

BELGRADE (R) — The Serbian government gave Saturday to demands that opposition victories in disputed municipal elections be restored, agreeing with protesting students that the results must be honoured.

"The Serbian government representatives agreed with the necessity that the will of the citizens expressed at local elections must be fully respected," said a statement signed by Serbian Deputy Prime Ministers Ratko Markovic and Nedeljko Sipovac and a delegation of students in Belgrade.

The students were demanding recognition of opposition victories in Serbia's Nov. 17 local elections, free access to state media and the sacking of Belgrade University's rector.

"Their stands and ours are identical on the three demands," Cedimir Jovanovic, a student protest leader, told Reuters.

"The talks were not unpleasant, they immediately expressed readiness to accept our demands," he said.

The statement went on: "In keeping with this, the government will during the day order the Justice Ministry to demand of competent state bodies, which still have not finished establishing final election results, to do this urgently."

But Serbian opposition leaders, wary of any promises and wanting to see action, started traffic jams in central Belgrade Saturday, the 55th straight day of peaceful protests against alleged election fraud.

Mr. Milosevic has come under tremendous international pressure to reinstate the opposition victories.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Europe John Kornblum said Saturday that Washington was considering a unilateral freeze on new trade deals and official relations to pressure Mr. Milosevic into acknowledging the opposition victories.

Zajedno (Together), as the opposition coalition is known, claimed to have won 14 of Serbia's 18 largest cities including the capital Belgrade and the second city Nis.

But President Slobodan Milosevic's Socialist (SPS) annulled the victories, claiming unspecified irregularities.

The cancellation triggered a wave of daily street protests, now in their eighth week, by Belgrade students and Zajedno supporters — the most serious challenge to leftist rule in Serbia since 1945.

The statement came hours after political sources had said Mr. Milosevic was ex-

pected to acknowledge opposition victories in the elections and call for a coalition government.

It remained unclear whether the acknowledgement would be made public in a statement or whether the SPS and allied Yugoslav United Left (JUL) would try to save face by passing the buck to the government.

Political sources believed the government could carry out orders and award Zajedno victory with much less publicity.

In a similar move earlier this week the Serbian government ordered the Election Commission in Nis to concede the ruling SPS election loss there.

The decision to uphold Zajedno's election victories was made at a meeting Friday of senior SPS and JUL officials, a political source said.

Hours later the Belgrade JUL board issued a statement demanding that "all local authorities be set up in keeping with the expressed will of the electorate. The electoral will of Serbia's citizens must be respected."

Belgrade Mayor Nebojsa Covic, a moderate politician who reportedly fought a major battle with SPS and JUL hardliners, finally broke silence Saturday, slamming party diehards.

"From the onset of the se-

rious political election crisis, I have been using my leverage to convince those who should be making decisions that it (the crisis) should be overcome by recognising the electoral will of the citizens."

He had refused to constitute a new city assembly, control of which the SPS allegedly wrested by fraud from Zajedno, because it was "appointed in a way against which tens of thousands of students and Belgraders have been demonstrating for two months now."

The Serbian government promised to punish those who forged the election results: "The competent state bodies will be demanded also to determine responsibility and adequate punishment in cases where election results were forged."

Political sources in Belgrade said Mr. Milosevic was preparing a big reshuffle in the government, the ruling party and state media after the election fiasco.

"It is definitely on, but will not happen until the crisis is over," a senior political source told Reuters.

"Milosevic will endorse a report by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe in its entirety," he said.

China's veto stalls Guatemalan peace process

UNITED NATIONS (R) — Angered at Guatemala's ties to Taiwan, China killed a U.N. plan to monitor disarmament and a ceasefire in the Central American country that just ended a brutal 36-year-old civil war.

Reactions were swift with Guatemala threatening to take China's action to the General Assembly in an attempt to embarrass Beijing before the full 185-U.N. membership. And senior U.N. officials sought to engineer alternatives quickly to prevent the peace process from unravelling.

One alternative mentioned was a non-U.N. multinational force paid for by troops contributors or one under the leadership of the Organisation of American States.

At a late Friday night meeting, all Security Council members except China voted in favour of a resolution that would have dispatched 155 peacekeepers to Guatemala for three months under a U.N.-brokered peace accord signed on Dec. 29 between the government and leftist rebels.

But a negative vote by China, which along with the United States, Britain, France and Russia, has veto power in the 15-member council, meant that Council President Hisashi Owada of Japan had to announce that the resolution had failed.

It was China's first U.N. Security Council veto in nearly 24 years. China considers Taiwan a renegade province and objects to any country having diplomatic ties to Taipei.

Taiwan, in turn, has given generous economic aid to several small, impoverished nations around the world. Commenting on the veto, Taiwan's Foreign Minister John Chang said in Taipei: "The move will only cause antipathy in the Central American nations."

Under the peace accord, Guatemala's army would redeploy units to specified locations, after which troops from the rebel Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit (URNG) would move to eight assembly points and disarm.

The U.N. observers were to verify the process.

Police teargas demonstrators in Seoul; pressure on government mounts

SEOUL (AFP) — Riot police Saturday fired volleys of tear gas to break up a massive rally in central Seoul against an unpopular labour law, as pressure mounted on the government to repeal the law.

Most of the 15,000 workers, intellectuals, religious leaders and student activists in the rally scattered when phalanxes of gas-shooting police moved in on the protest in the city's Pagoda Park.

But some, shouting "down with (President) Kim Young-Sam," fought back with stones and tried to break through to nearby Myeongdong Cathedral as rumours spread that police had moved in to arrest seven labour leaders holed up in the church.

AFP reporters on the scene said the tear gas, fired from vehicle-mounted multiple launchers, was so heavy they could not see.

Plainclothes police earlier Saturday tried three times to serve arrest warrants on the seven labour leaders, headed by Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) head Kwon Young-Gil, but were driven back by supporters.

Hundreds of other riot police surrounded the cathedral.

The Seoul rally was one of at least five nationwide against the labour law, which was railroaded through parliament by the ruling New Korea Party (NKP) on Dec. 26. Similar demonstrations were underway in the industrial cities of Masan, Ulsan and Changwon. The rally took place after labour unionists rejected as a "farce" an offer by the government to hold a televised debate on the unpopular law, which gives

employers a freer hand to fire workers and extend working hours. It also outlaws the KCTU until 2000.

In Ulsan thousands of workers from the giant Hyundai Group staged a mass rally, and the Federation of Hyundai Unions, which boasts 80,000 members, called for all-out strikes next week. Federation members include 32,000 at Hyundai Motor Co., South Korea's largest automaker, and 20,000 at Hyundai Heavy Industries that has the country's biggest shipyard. The strike call came after a Hyundai Motor employee Friday tried to burn himself to death during a protest march. The worker, who suffered burns on 90 per cent of his body, was still alive Saturday.

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Tigers claim killing over 200 soldiers, admit losing 140

COLOMBO (AFP) — Tamil Tiger guerrillas Saturday claimed to have killed "over 200" government soldiers while losing 140 of their own fighters during a major attack against two strategic army bases in northern Sri Lanka.

The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said in a statement from its London office that it destroyed 11 long-range artillery pieces and captured a large quantity of small arms and ammunition.

"Over 200 Sri Lankan troops were killed and hundreds more badly injured when LTTE forces overran two military complexes at Paranthan and Elephant," the LTTE said.

The LTTE clandestine radio, the Voice of Tigers, said 78 women fighters were among the 140 Tiger rebels killed in Thursday's

pre-dawn assault on the army.

"We have completed our mission to destroy the armories at Paranthan and Elephant Pass army camps," the Voice of Tigers said, adding rebels also smashed a 10-kilometre bunker line of the security forces.

The Defence Ministry Friday said 142 bodies of government soldiers had been found by troops during a clearing operation and claimed that more than 500 Tiger rebels were killed or wounded in the fierce battle.

The ministry said it intercepted Tiger radio communications giving out names of 171 rebels, including 20 top leaders, who perished in the fighting.

Official figures show that 232 government troops were seriously wounded in

the seven-hour battle, the worst against security forces in six months.

"A major search is now underway to assess the damage and look for victims," a military official here said. "There are small groups of Tigers who are still confronting troops."

There was no immediate report of casualties in the renewed fighting, a military spokesman here said.

Military analysts said the massive attack against government positions underscored the vulnerability of troops stretched thinly in hostile territory of the island's north.

Security forces have spread themselves over a large area following the capture of the LTTE's main bastion of Jaffna and the key towns that were under rebel control in the north of the country.

Police find weapons cache in Corsica

AJACCIO, Corsica (R) — Paramilitary police found several dozen handguns, rifles and rocket-launchers in Corsica Friday as seven separatist sympathisers were brought before Paris anti-terrorism judges in another probe.

Gendarmerie police said the weapons cache was discovered in Borgo, south of the town of Bastia, in a probe following the machine-gunning of Gendarmerie barracks in Saint

Marie Sicche Dec. 27. The arms including Remington rifles and ammunition were found at the home of one of nine suspects detained in the probe.

Separately, justice sources said seven men close to the Corsica Nationalist separatist movement were presented to anti-terrorism judges Jean-Francois Ricard and Laurence Le Vert in Paris.

A Corsica Nationalist is the legal facade of the outlawed separatist Corsican National Liberation Front (FLNC).

The seven are suspected of involvement in the machine-gunning of the Le Paschal Hotel in the town of Ajaccio in October. The FLNC has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Justice sources said the seven would likely be placed under investigation and ordered held in preventive custody.

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New bridge to Gulf

HRH CROWN Prince Hassan's keynote address to the convention of the Mediterranean Charter Group in Madrid on Friday appears to have aimed first and foremost at expanding the horizon of the ongoing governmental and non-governmental efforts to put Euro-Mediterranean relations in a well-defined framework. To begin with, Prince Hassan reminded his audience, made up of non-governmental organisations, that "the East Mediterranean does not end in a cul-de-sac in the Levant;" rather it is a geographic area that extends to the Gulf region as well. The organic link between East Mediterranean and Arab Gulf countries finds expression in common history, shared religion and culture as well as common demographic conditions. This is not to mention the growing economic ties between the two sides of the same geographic entity.

"In terms of people as well as ideas and culture," Prince Hassan said, "East Mediterranean and the Gulf region are two sides of the same coin. This makes the security of the Arab Gulf states and that of East Mediterranean intertwined and inter-linked necessitating a comprehensive approach and application." These facts, Crown Prince Hassan said, makes it incumbent that any regional framework for the broader concept of the Middle East should be "based on a broadly defined security concept encompassing the military, economic and human dimensions."

We cannot agree more with these thoughts, especially insofar as advancing Euro-East Mediterranean relations is concerned. The Gulf crisis in 1990 demonstrated very vividly how difficult, if not outright impossible, it was to separate Middle Eastern security and development from that of the Gulf region. If anything, the war that broke out in 1991 in the wake of the occupation of Kuwait by Iraq demonstrated that the conflicts and factors at play in the entire region are so inter-dependent that they can hardly be viewed in different prisms. Whether we are speaking in terms of peoples, ideas, culture, security or economic and political cooperation, the two areas have to be treated with a comprehensive approach.

As solutions to most human problems in any region of the world must be cooperative and interdisciplinary, so must be the approach to the East Mediterranean basin's conflicts and challenges. Since the formation of the Mediterranean Charter Group is essentially a non-governmental attempt to put Euro-Middle Eastern relations on the right track, we trust that the fresh ideas advanced by Prince Hassan will also be heard and acted upon by the concerned governments, both in Europe and in this part of the world.

It is only through concerted and joint efforts by governments and NGOs, here and on the European continent, that we can hope to undertake mutually-reinforcing projects — and achieve complementarity.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

A WRITER for Al Ra'i Saturday criticised people who display greed and voracity during the month of Ramadan, reminding readers that Muslims should give attention to fasting and prayers during the holy month. Sultan Hattab expressed astonishment at the way people behave and the different types of food they eat and stockpile during this month, and said this practice shows that they give more attention to their stomach than to spiritual life. The writer also criticised the government and the local media for turning people's attention to or reminding them of the fact that plenty of meat, poultry, vegetables and fruit are found in sufficient quantities in the local markets and for almost daily tackling questions related to food instead of urging the rich to be more generous in their help to the poor and encouraging Muslims to display solidarity with the needy. At the same time, the writer reminded the readers that food stockpiling is bound to create instability in the market and encourage merchants to increase their prices in a manner that would harm the poor more than the other sectors. He said that in Ramadan many people fall in debt due to their extravagance and many suffer from indigestion from overeating.

A WRITER for Al Ra'i Saturday said the latest explosions in Tel Aviv were the making of extremist groups in Israel who oppose the redeployment in Hebron or any Israeli pullout of forces from other Palestinian lands. The explosions serve as a clear message from these groups to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, warning him against committing himself to the implementation of the Oslo accord that provide for the redeployment, according to Ahmad Misch. The writer said that if the earlier explosions in Tel Aviv and in Jerusalem were planned by Arabs who wanted to ruin the peace process, the recent explosions in Tel Aviv were clearly perpetrated by Zionist extremists bent on achieving the same objective. The Tel Aviv explosions, coming close on the heels of the Israeli soldier's attack on Hebron civilians, clearly display the extremists' hostile attitude towards peace with the Arabs and their intention to carry out terrorist attacks any time and place to achieve their evil ends, added the writer. He said that unless the Israeli government implements the Oslo accord with the Arabs to preempt further attacks more obstacles will pile up in the path of peace.

Sunday's Economic Pulse

Economy is doing well, contrary to some businessmen's complaints

By Dr. Fahed Fanek

A VIEWPOINT on the Jordanian economy has two sides: one represents optimism and confidence and is expressed by outsiders who observe the economic situation from afar, the other represents pessimism and doubts, expressed by some dissatisfied Jordanian businessmen.

It is worth to examine the basis for these two contradicting points of view, and the reasons for which Jordanians see the dark side of the economy while foreign observers see the bright side and think highly of the Kingdom's economic future.

On the other hand, one may like to find out which of the two groups depends on studies, analysis and meaningful indicators to measure economic performance and judge the outcome, and which group depends on its hunches and recycled rumours which are not confirmed by real life.

It is only normal to have some failures among the business community in the country. They witness a decline in their businesses and profits because others had entered their market more forcefully and were able to seize their share of the market. These people who fail are justified in their complaints, but they should reevaluate their own state of affairs to reform obsolete methods, remedy shortcomings and try to make a comeback or surrender. It is not up to them to evaluate the Jordanian economy as a whole, and pass judgement based on what happens to them.

If general sales tax reaches JD 400 million this year, which forms 10 per cent of all commodities sold to consumers, then the cost of such sales must be in the order of JD 4.4 billion, over and above the exempted items such as food, medicine, water, fuel, etc. This indicates a substantial purchasing power and an expanded domestic market. If a given businessman is suffering from recession, it is his own problem not that of the national economy, which is growing steadily.

On the other hand, imports of commodities rose in 1996 by around 24 per cent, quite a substantial jump. If the reason behind this jump is more raw materials, then industry must be in good shape. If the reason is more consumer goods, then the public is prospering. If the reason is more machinery and capital equipment, then new investments must be soaring. It is beyond comprehension to hear businessmen talk about economic recession in a year when imports are growing at the rate of 24 per cent.

And one more point: the businessmen who blame the economy, rather than their behaviour, are not well informed and scientifically qualified to pass judgement on the overall economic situation and the likely future of the economy. There are specific institutions specialised in assessing the economic situation in the country; they can push up or down any company, project or national economy according to their evaluation.

What do such specialised institutions say about the Jordanian economy? Among the most prominent of these institutions is

"Standard and Poor's" which, in September 1996, raised the long-term foreign currency rating of Jordan from B+ to BB- and revised the outlook on the rating from positive to stable. Standard and Poor's also assigned a BB- rating to Jordan's Brady bonds and affirmed its BBB- long-term and A-3 short-term ratings on Jordan's dinar denominated debt.

The upgrade reflected a lower external debt burden as well as government's increased fiscal restraint. However, Jordan is still highly dependent on remittances, tourism receipts and intraregional trade. As such, its economy remains highly sensitive to developments in the volatile Middle East.

When I meet a Jordanian businessman complaining about the had economic situation, I know for sure that he is talking about himself and describing his own bad situation. I also know that he is a failure with no future. The Jordanian economy as a whole has been upbeat for the past five years. It has a promising future for the coming five years, irrespective of the developments on the peace front.

The director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), who was in Jordan last week, described the economic achievements in the Kingdom during the past five years as wonders. The local complaints which we hear from time to time will soon disappear as their sources will be kicked out of the market and replaced with the new generation of dynamic managers and entrepreneurs.

Dreadful divides and murderous misrules

By Daya Kishan Thussu

LONDON — As the new Stability Force (S-For) takes over in Bosnia-Herzegovina, legitimising its division on ethnic lines, the curse of partition continues to reverberate in other parts of the world.

S-For, led by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), replaces the I-For (Implementation Force), which was deployed a year ago to put in place the much-heralded peace deal hammered out in the United States and signed by presidents Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia, Franjo Tudjman of Croatia and Alija Izetbegovic of Bosnia.

While the negotiators pored over maps, divided up burnt and devastated villages and towns, drew up boundaries through the houses and gardens of ordinary Bosnians, they followed an old practice mastered by the big powers — "divide and rule" or, at least, "maintain your sphere of influence."

But does partition work? In Northern Ireland, the legacy of the 1922 partition along religious lines has been decades of sectarian

hate and violence between Republicans and Unionists wanting to remain part of the United Kingdom.

Perhaps those redrawing the Balkan map should have looked more closely at the record of the divided lands, communities and cultures common in the so-called Third World, such as the division of British India in 1947 into two sovereign nations, India and Pakistan.

Pakistan was created ostensibly to give a homeland to Indian Muslims, but more Muslims live in India today than in Pakistan. Indeed the wars between the two countries since independence — in 1948, 1965 and 1971 — and the continuing border dispute over Kashmir can be directly linked to the partition.

The legacy of that dreadful event — which claimed nearly a million lives and displaced more than 10 million people — can be seen in other problems. The ethnic strife between the Urdu-speaking Mohajirs (which means refugees) and the dominant Sindhi community in Karachi is a case in point. The dispute, which has killed thousands of people,

is cruelly ironic since Urdu is the official language of Pakistan.

In addition, the enmity between India and Pakistan has resulted in high defence spending in the sub-continent and correspondingly low allocations for health and education.

Both countries will be marking 1997 as the golden jubilee year for independence, recalling in patriotic sentiments the great events of the liberation movement. Ceremonies will be held, colourful rallies staged, conferences organised and media roused to hype nationalist sentiment.

In this age of globalisation, whipping up the nationalist horse can always produce political dividends. Insecure politicians, such as the little-known prime minister of India, Deve Gowda, who heads a 13-party coalition, will try to outdo their rivals in playing the Hindu nationalist card.

He faces a serious political threat from the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party, which gained the highest number of seats in the national parliament by riding the Hindu juggernaut.

In Pakistan, too, where elections are scheduled for February, nationalism in its Islamic version is likely to dominate politics in the new year. Although Westernised, key players in the political arena, such as ousted Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, former cricket star Imran Khan and President Farooq Leghari will not hesitate to exploit religion. Imran, especially, has made much of his "rediscovery" of Islam.

In Bangladesh, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary of independence, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the daughter of the country's founder, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, wants to reinstate her father to the status of Bangbandhu (the friend of Bangladeshis), a name given to him during the liberation struggle.

Independence was achieved after a war against West Pakistan. Apart from religion, East Pakistan — as Bangladesh was called until 1971 — had little in common with its other half. Bengalis felt they were being discriminated against, their language and culture was not being valued and that they had little control

over their economy. Defying the religious logic of partition, Bengali nationalism triumphed and independence Bangladesh chose a poem by Nobel prize-winning Bengali poet-philosopher Rabindranath Tagore as its national anthem.

Tagore, a Hindu, is also the author of India's national anthem. The end of the British Raj in India unleashed forces which made it impossible for European empires to continue in Asia. Within two years of India's partition came the independence of Indonesia from Dutch colonial rule. Eight years after that, Ghana became the first country in Africa to throw off the colonial yoke and the "wind of change" swept across the continent.

In Africa, too, most states were created with scant regard to geography, history or ethnic or cultural considerations. Mozambicans have half of their families in Malawi, Ghanaians have relatives who are Nigerian citizens, and Somalis have cousins in Ethiopia. Much of the post-independence conflict in Africa stems from border disputes arising from

the "divide and rule" policies of European colonial powers.

In the post-colonial, post-cold war era, it is fashionable, especially in the West, to dismiss such issues as out of date. But to see their relevance, one needs only to look at the historic roots of the 1994 Rwandan massacres.

If events in Bosnia are anything to go by, it seems that the international community has not learned much from past mistakes. While 30,000 Western troops patrol Bosnian cities and towns, the idea of a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural "state" in Balkans has been consigned to history.

At the end of the 20th century, the West has effectively legitimised tribal warfare — known in its fascist incarnation as "ethnic cleansing" — in Europe, the beacon of modernity.

Daya Kishan Thussu lectures in media studies at Britain's Coventry University. He is co-author of the book "Contra-Flow in Global News". This article is reprinted from the Gemini News Service.

Doomsday times ten

By Wynne Dyer

DO not normally commit plagiarism, but occasionally, another journalist has an idea so good that it is worth nipping it off and spreading it around the planet immediately. Such a one is David Nicholson-Lord, who recently phoned up William Hill, the British bookmakers, and asked them to quote the odds on the end of the world.

William Hill have the habit of making odds and taking bets on all sorts of unlikely events, mainly because it provides excellent and cheap publicity. They presumably have a battery of anonymous experts on retainer to help them set the odds. Once they have announced them, after all, someone may actually place a bet.

So Nicholson-Lord asked William Hill to quote the odds on ten different ways for the world to end. He did not miss one, except perhaps a global plague of bad breath.

The good old Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse were there, of course, but also such relative newcomers to the list of global threats as climate change, overpopulation and space invaders. So William Hill set to work polling the experts, and the results were splashed across the Sunday magazine of the Independent newspaper in London last week.

What immediately got one's attention was that the trendiest new ways for the world to end got the short shrift. The end of the world through overpopulation, for example, was given odds of 25 million-to-one

against. That means that if you laid a bet of 10 pounds on that proposition with William Hill today, and you turned out to be right, they would pay you a quarter of a billion pounds when it happens.

Are they being generous, or just cunning? Well, if you consider how the bookies have defined the end of the world, you begin to see the method in their madness. They will only have to pay out if, between now and the year 2097, the world should fall to a population of only 1,000 people.

Fair enough. You could hardly say the world has ended if there are still tens of thousands of people clumping up the place. All kinds of bad things may happen in the course of the next century, and no doubt some of them will. But this definition does let William Hill off the hook a little, for it is very hard to get down from six billion people to only one thousand by any known means.

Among the disasters that might get the world down to that number, the final cause quite literally cannot be overpopulation. Ten or twenty people trying to live on this planet might trigger a general catastrophe, but only a much more specific calamity, like war or pestilence, could get us down below a billion or two.

The same logic relegates a couple of other favourite doomsday scenarios to the also-rans. Pollution is a million-to-one against, drought is 100,000-to-one against, and climate change and famine both come in at 75,000-to-one against.

These phenomena may cause us huge problems in the course of the next century, and could well bring vast misery and mass death in their train, but it is hard to see how any of them could wipe out the human race. Indeed, if we dropped down to a mere billion or two people, these threats would almost automatically cease to be problems.

Then there is the fashionable disaster-of-the-week, the "coming global anarchy." William Hill assess that at 50,000-to-one against (generous, to my mind, as it is even harder to see how anarchy could wipe everybody out). And there is the end of the world through the natural processes of the universe — the Sun goes nova, we are sucked into a giant black hole, there is another Big Bang — which they dismiss as a million-to-one against.

That leaves three major contenders, and very interesting ones they are. "I Came From Outer Space" is taken quite seriously — 500,000-to-one against an alien invasion before 2097, but a mere 10,000-to-one against a massive meteor strike like the one that probably took out the dinosaurs 65 million years ago. Pestilence does even better: only 5,000-to-one against new diseases arising that virtually wipe out the human race. And war comes in far ahead of the rest of the field, at only 500-to-one against.

Now, you can discount all this as wild speculation untamed by market discipline, since William Hill know that they would never really have to pay out. If the world were

down to 1,000 people, it is highly unlikely that any of the firm's partners would be numbered among the survivors, nor any of the punters who laid bets with them either. And in any case, a world as sparsely populated as that would have stopped using money.

But bookies do understand odds, and they always take them seriously. The numbers they have come up with this time are far less alarming than the risk estimates we usually hear, and the logic behind them is implausible.

Most prophets of doom have a professional interest in inflating estimates of risk, whether to draw attention to the danger they most fear, or simply to themselves. Bookies are free of such motives, and they have concluded that the risk of the human race being effectively wiped out during the next century is very small.

The only dangers they took really to heart were the old ones: war, disease and the oldest threat of all (though we only recognised its true nature recently): meteor bombardment from outer space. But global warming? The "clash of civilisations"? The coming global anarchy? Get real.

Those threats might kill millions or even hundreds of millions of people, but the only potential calamities that endanger all the billions of mankind in the next century are more traditional perils: mutant diseases, rogue meteors, and war. And there is hardly more than one chance in five hundred that even those threats could do away with us entirely. The odd makers say so.

LETTERS

Investment in Aqaba needed

To the Editor:

IN REPLY to Sirka Itävaara's letter "Why is Aqaba empty?" (Jordan Times, Jan. 8, 1997), I would like to recommend that he ask the private sector, and not the government, as to why the situation is such. You see, the private sector in Jordan recognises the potential in Aqaba and over the last 15 years there were at least five major proposals made to the Aqaba Region Authority (ARA) to work on a master plan and develop both the north and south beaches in Aqaba.

In the early 1990s, a group of investors spent over \$500,000 on a master plan for the south beach and signed a land-purchase agreement with the ARA. To everyone's surprise, the government suddenly decided to cancel that contract, as well as other contracts signed by the ARA — retroactively. This caused quite a stir in the business community and shook away investors' confidence in Jordan. To add insult to injury, the ARA then decided to throw away all previous master plans and to do its own master plan for the south beach, using local engineers with no experience in resort development. They then proceeded to try and attract investors using an auction system for the land. Needless to say, the plan attracted very few investors and no significant development has taken place since then.

Meanwhile, another Middle East country, namely Egypt, has done a superb job at developing its Red Sea coastline, and attracting tourism. Sharm El Sheikh and Hurgada are now considered among the most attractive tourist destinations in the region.

I hope what I wrote somehow answers Mr. Itävaara's question, while encouraging the government to do something about Aqaba.

Marwan Attalla,
Amman

The Jordan Times welcomes letters and contributions from its readers on any subject they wish to tackle. Letters intended for publication, however, should contain the writer's full name and preferably address, as well. Names can be withheld only upon request and under special circumstances. Letters are subject to editing. The newspaper is not responsible for the return of unused manuscripts.

Featu

By Douglas Jehl

CAMP ASHRAF, Iraq — In this enclave of Iraq, the soldiers pay tribute to the President Saddam Hussein of Iraq but to an Iranian woman they call Maryam.

"She is the symbol of our struggle," veiled young women chanted after storming into a fortified bunker in a military training exercise.

"She is the tip of the arrow," proclaimed another, a gunman in a Soviet-made tank.

By the map, Camp Ashraf lies in Iraq, 100 kilometres north of Baghdad. But a more accurate description would be the military headquarters of Iran-in-exile, and a place unto itself. The sprawling camp is home to the leadership of the National Liberation Army, a formidable Iranian opposition force.

It is also home to unfathomable devotion toward the 43-year-old woman her followers say should be

Ara to sol

By Edna Fernandes
Reuter

LONDON — Britain's double-decker bus could be at the cutting edge of an environmental breakthrough.

For the past two years a London bus operator has carried out experiments with an Arab inventor who says he has the solution to the black diesel-based pollution fumes that led Britain's air quality levels to break world safety standards last summer.

Hassan Assali linked up with the London and Liverpool bus company Mersey-side Transport Ltd (MTL) in a two-year experiment to test his invention — an oil recycler which he told Reuters cuts pollution levels by 50 per cent and saves on lubricating oil by recycling it six to 10 times.

"Last summer there was big talk about stopping vehicles entering towns altogether as pollution levels were going through the roof."

"With this," said Mr. Assali cradling his recycler at his west London headquarters, "we can cut the amount of oil used and dumped, cut pollution levels, plus save money."

The recycler, invented by Mr. Assali who is managing director of the company behind it called Pinnore, has taken six years to develop and millions of pounds (dollars) of investment funded by an anonymous Palestinian backer.

The Pinnore recycler prototype was made by a gunsmith in London's East End because: "It was the only way we could get the precision we needed," said Mr. Assali.

Kuwait ident

KUWAIT CITY (AFP) — State security services have identified two Kuwaitis and a Jordanian accused of bombing a video store in a residential suburb of the capital in 1991. The Interior Ministry said Saturday.

State security "has arrested the perpetrators in the bombing incident of the Artistic Centre in the Salmia area" of Kuwait City in July 1991, a ministry statement said. The alleged ringleader of the group which carried out the attack was identified as a Jordanian.

Library Complaints

In September 1996, the British Library announced that it had received a letter from the Islamic Republic of Iran, asking it to remove from its collection all books and documents which were critical of the Islamic Revolution.

The letter, which was signed by the Iranian Minister of Culture, stated that the British Library was "a major source of information for the Islamic Republic of Iran" and that it was "a major source of information for the Islamic Republic of Iran".

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Features

An Iranian exile chief adored by her troops

By Douglas Jehl

CAMP ASHRAF, Iraq — In this enclave of Iraq, the road signs are in Persian and the soldiers pay tribute not to President Saddam Hussein of Iraq but to an Iranian woman they call Maryam.

"She is the symbol of our struggle," veiled young women chanted after storming into a fortified bunker in a military training exercise.

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Maryam Rajavi

Iran's next leader.

"We love Maryam Rajavi," men in camouflage dress chanted after braving a pool of fire in an exercise. "And we promise to take her to Tehran."

Built up on a barren salt plain beginning about a decade ago, the army, now about 30,000 strong, is by any measure the best-armed opposition force

poised outside any country's borders.

With raids deep into Iran in 1988, in the closing months of the eight-year Iran-Iraq war, it equipped itself with about \$2 billion worth of weapons, including American-made armoured personnel carriers and British-made Chieftain tanks.

And while Iran and Iraq

have meticulously observed a ceasefire since then, the presence of the opposition force reflects the enmity that the secular government in Baghdad still feels toward Tehran and its mullahs' power.

Twice a day, at noon and midnight, Iraqi television broadcasts a one-hour programme prepared by the Iranian opposition group, which pays neither for that service nor for its land at Camp Ashraf and four other camps within 90 kilometres of the Iranian border.

But to hear its members tell it, the real strength of the National Liberation Army derives from faith in Mrs. Rajavi and her husband, Massoud, architects of a force so highly motivated and disciplined that it borders on the bizarre.

Uniforms display neither rank nor insignia, in an effort to promote "camaraderie and fraternity in our struggle," said Kobra Tahmasbi, 39, a division commander. Mrs. Tahmasbi and most other top offi-

cers are women, who exercise an authority unimaginable at home.

Soldiers live communally, bunking as many as 20 to a sex-segregated room. Since 1991, even the married couples among them have lived apart. Their children have been sent abroad.

All rise promptly at 7 a.m. to begin their day with outdoor ceremonies that feature revolutionary hymns, oaths "in the name of God and in the name of the people of Tehran" and honour guards who stiffly bear the red, white and green Iranian colours. And there, as in most public rooms, they operate under the eyes of the Rajavis, whose photographs are displayed front and centre.

The leaders' images have even been affixed to some tank turrets, and crew members like Azadeh Salamet, 32, describe their leaders as a source of inspiration.

"As the years go on," said Ms. Salamet, who abandoned her marriage

and studies at the University of Washington to take up arms in Iraq in 1988, "my faith in both of them grows more and more."

Massoud Rajavi, a former student of political science at the University of Tehran, was long a prominent figure in the People's Mujahadeen of Iran, formed in the early 1960s in opposition to Shah Riza Pahlavi. After the 1979 Islamic revolution, it broke with Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini over his ouster of President Abol-Hassan Banisadr, endorsed armed struggle and became a powerful voice of anti-theocratic dissent.

After fleeing to Paris in 1982, Mr. Rajavi married Maryam, a metallurgical engineer who had been a student leader in Tehran, and together they established the National Liberation Army, the military wing of the National Council of Resistance, a coalition of Iranian opposition groups abroad.

Only twice since its formation has the opposition

army fought head-to-head against Iran, in the operations of 1988, when it once pushed more than 160 kilometres into Iran, and in 1991, when Iran's Revolutionary Guards invaded Iraq in an attempt to crush the resistance at the end of the Gulf war. By most accounts, the force has acquitted itself well, demonstrating an ability to confront and defeat some of "Iran's" best armoured units. It has been well-financed, mostly by contributions from inside Iran, its top officials say.

In a report two years ago, the U.S. State Department cited the organisation's past Marxist leanings and allegations that elements of the council took part in violent attacks against Americans in the early 1970s, and concluded that it did not represent an acceptable alternative to the current government of Iran.

But such criticism appears to have done nothing to diminish the adulation shown in Camp

Ashraf, where followers say they dream of the day that Mrs. Rajavi assumes a role the organisation voted her in 1993: transitional president who would wield power after the fall of the Iranian government. As soldiers and officers filed into a dining hall for lunch recently, a huge photograph of her, smiling beatifically, stood on an easel at the head of the room. Around the room, television sets were showing videotapes of Mrs. Rajavi's triumphal return this month to Iraq after three years in Paris, the organisation's political headquarters, and there were throaty cheers.

"I have found my final answer in Maryam Rajavi," said Mohammad Taslimi, 46, a political prisoner under the Shah who is the camp's chief of logistics. "Maryam Rajavi is anathema to the Khomeini ideology, and that's why she is the cure."

International Herald Tribune

Arab inventor claims to solve diesel pollution

By Edna Fernandes
Reuters

Made in China

LONDON — Britain's double-decker bus could be at the cutting edge of an environmental breakthrough.

For the past two years a London bus operator has carried out experiments with an Arab inventor who says he has the solution to the black diesel-based pollution fumes that led Britain's air quality levels to break world safety standards last summer.

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The recycler, invented by Mr. Assali who is managing director of the company behind it called Pinmore, has taken six years to develop and millions of pounds (dollars) of investment funded by an anonymous Palestinian hacker.

The Pinmore recycler prototype was made by a gunsmith in London's East End because: "It was the only way we could get the precision we needed," said Mr. Assali.

It is now being manufactured in China's Huzhou Province and has sold 6,000 units at a cost of 250 pounds (\$425.2) each.

Customers to date include an Algerian bus company which has ordered 3,000 recyclers and Saudi Arabia's frontier guards who bought 1,000 for their trucks — "they're constantly plagued by desert sand getting into the oil," added the inventor.

In November Mr. Assali held a conference in Oxford, England, attended by more than 40 delegates from the transport industry, including bus companies.

At the conference MTL publicly endorsed the recycler after two years of tests on its oldest London buses. Professor Gordon Andrews of the Fuel and Energy Department at Leeds University and a consultant to the motor industry, also agreed it worked.

Phil Locke, systems manager for group engineering at MTL, told Reuters: "We've had a lot of success and it's given us tremendous savings. It's also given us smaller fuel emissions, which are down sharply."

He said the bus group's initial scepticism had vanished and it is now considering buying up to 2,000 recyclers for its fleet in London and Liverpool.

"We've had so many people approach us in the past with different systems and they say it works. But most don't. We took a gamble on Mr. Assali and it's working," said Locke.

"I think it's been looked at by enough people and

they see the benefits — it has the chance of turning into a big thing."

The reception from motor manufacturers like Nissan has been cooler, says Mr. Assali, despite the pressing environmental and health arguments to cut pollution.

Mr. Assali also says two major oil companies have called him to rubbish his work out of hand. "I was afraid they would send a hit-man," he joked.

But he says the evidence is in his favour. Pinmore carried out experiments for two years in north London with MTL.

Recycling bus

The experiment fitted one bus with a recycler and one without, said Mr. Assali. "We said to the client: 'Run these buses in the worst conditions possible — stopping, starting continuously and braking suddenly'."

He claimed the old Red Routemaster bus, the famous London symbol also renowned for belching black fumes, was fitted with the recycler in February 1995 and did not have to change its oil until July that year.

The London arm of MTL then invited Mr. Assali to its headquarters in Liverpool where "I explained the invention to the top brass."

Commenting on the financial benefits, he says that MTL as a company uses 40 tonnes of oil a year — which can easily be cut by a sixth on average by using the recycler.

"We started with three principles in mind — to save oil, maintain engine quality and to help the environment by cutting polluting emissions."

The Pinmore filters the

oil using a secondary filter controlled by a microprocessor.

The filter has a pyramid of discs, down which oil cascades. Discs are heated to 160 degrees, bringing oil to 120 degrees, hotter than the engine temperature. As oil trickles down the discs the contaminants, such as water, diesel fuel and gases evaporate.

The resulting vapour is fed into a chamber where it is burned off separately. Very old vehicles like the Red Routemaster buses, some of which are 25 years old, can run for 60,000 kilometres (37,280 miles) without changing the oil — that is six times the normal distance.

First buses, then the world

Pinmore has high hopes for its product and plans to take polluting vehicles by storm. "We will hit the bus companies first and then the black cab market in London — 23,000 cabs in total."

"We will then tackle the major UK cities — Sheffield, Glasgow, Bradford. The market is massive. We could take it to Paris, Frankfurt, Berlin — every diesel city in Europe."

MTL now plans to set up a mobile laboratory where anyone can inspect the recycler and the test results.

"We're working towards helping others fight pollution. We're not trying to keep it to ourselves," said Locke.

"If we put it into the bus market first, then perhaps someone from the government will say: 'If it works for buses then why can't it work for taxis or the private car?'"

Reformed car engines endure but fuel cells loom

By Neil Winton
Reuters

LONDON — The internal combustion engine, guilty of guzzling gasoline and poisoning people for much of the 20th century, will still power most cars well into the next one.

Of the exotic technologies which might provide a clean and efficient alternative, only the fuel cell looks likely to have a significant impact anytime soon.

Battery power has been five years away from providing a viable solution for almost half a century. Solar power has been responsible for easterly rallies of weird-looking vehicles in hot countries. Gas turbines have been around for years without making the breakthrough. Esoterica like the Stirling engine, the Miller cycle engine, and the Orbital two-stroke engine all have their proselytisers.

But car manufacturers, often prodded by legislation they initially claimed would ruin them, have made remarkable progress in cleaning up emissions from petrol and diesel engines, and at the same time improving fuel consumption dramatically.

And improvements are still on the cards, according to German mass car manufacturer Volkswagen.

"We can still get about 10 per cent more fuel consumption even out of the latest TDI (turbo diesel injection), and with direct injection petrol injection technology we can make a 25 per cent cut in consumption compared with today," said Dietrich Meyerdiets, head of VW's Environment and Transportation Department.

"These two fuels will stay with us for quite a while," Mr. Meyerdiets told Reuters during a briefing at VW's headquarters in Wolfsburg, Germany.

He said particulate emissions from diesels can be cut by 70 per cent.

Diesel power has been touted as the best "green" fuel around, but detractors say this reputation is ruined by unacceptable particulate emissions. Particulates are tiny, unburnt pieces of fuel which lodge in peoples' lungs and may cause cancer.

Experts share this view of the expected longevity of the internal combustion engine. New fuels might bolster this.

"Natural gas will be the next major fuel, and the internal combustion engine will continue to be the dominant technology," said Dr. Steve Cousins of Cranfield University's International Ecotechnology Research Centre.

"Natural gas means that the internal combustion engine has 40 years of life still, and it is very important to carry on making this more efficient. But by far the biggest gains are to come from making vehicles less powerful and more lightweight."

Cousins feels that new technologies like the fuel cell have a place, but are a distraction from the main task of making the internal combustion engine more efficient.

Big car makers don't seem to agree.

Companies like Germany's VW and Daimler-Benz, General Motors of the U.S. and Japanese companies Toyota, Honda, Mazda and Nissan are all busily exploring fuel cell technology.

Sweden's Volvo and Renault and Peugeot of France are known to be evaluating fuel cells.

VW said much progress

can be made from fine-tuning what it called the "classic engines" and trying new fuels made from vegetable oil, alcohol and natural gas. "Hybrids," combining diesel and battery power might be viable interim power plants. Pure battery power was unlikely to be a solution.

VW's Meyerdiets told Reuters that fuel cells were promising. Production would begin next century, but was far away from mass production.

Ballard Power Systems of Vancouver, Canada, begs to differ.

Ballard says it is the world leader in developing fuel cell power systems which convert natural gas, methanol, or hydrogen fuel into electricity without combustion and therefore have zero emissions. Fuel cell engines are superior to zero emission options like batteries because they can match the petrol engine for range and performance and don't take hours to recharge, Ballard says.

Buses using its fuel cells will be on the streets of Chicago by 1998, Ballard says. They are currently being tested there.

"Then comes the car. They should be on the road from 2003 and 2005," said Ballard Vice-President and Chief Financial Officer Mossadq Umedaly.

Mr. Umedaly, in a telephone interview from Toronto, said Ballard had solved the problem of size. Previous fuel cells had to be about the size of a van to produce enough power to propel a small car.

"What's lacking now are other components like the fuel processor which extracts the hydrogen out of the fuel, which would be methanol. Our main focus now is cost. We

have the technology in the lab to cut costs significantly," Umedaly said.

"We will have the cost down by 2000 so that it is competitive with the internal combustion engine, given volumes of production."

Mr. Umedaly said initial sales of fuel cell powered vehicles would rely on being kick-started by laws insisting on a percentage of zero emission vehicles, which take effect in California, Massachusetts and New York early next century.

Mr. Umedaly had no qualms about this force-feeding of consumers.

"Nothing happened with seat belts or airbags without legislation first. No one does these things because of a feeling for human life. But after the mandate, competition takes over — we now have airbags in every door. First the law, then the competition."

Dr. David Wood from the School of Advanced Engineering at Britain's Durham University agrees that new technologies like fuel cells are unlikely to fly without serious prodding from government.

"There are only two things which will make new technology have a big impact. One is if the price of fossil fuel is artificially sent through the roof, the other is legislation to force it like in California," Dr. Wood said.

"Without coercion, the economics of the internal combustion engine in manufacturing and sales support is just vast. None of the other sources have those economies of scale after more than 100 years of experience," Dr. Wood said.

The Barcelona Declaration pledged about \$12 billion development package for the Mediterranean with the aim of creating a free-trade area between the EU and the 12 non-member Mediterranean states.

Kuwait identifies 3 as store bombers

KUWAIT CITY (AFP) — State security services have identified two Kuwaitis and a Jordanian accused of bombing a video store in a residential suburb of the capital in 1991, the Interior Ministry said Saturday.

State security "has arrested the perpetrators in the bombing incident of the Artistes Centre in the Salmia area" of Kuwait City in July 1991, a ministry statement said.

The alleged ringleader of the group which car-

ried out the bombing is a Jordanian, Asam Taher Al Burqawi, who is now serving a prison sentence in Jordan for previous convictions, the statement said.

The two Kuwaiti suspects are the driver of the car used in the attack, Wisam Mukhlid Wisam Al Azmi and Khaled Fouad Al Baghdad, who fired the rocket propelled grenade (RPG) at the store, it added.

The statement did not say why the three men staged the attack,

although some previously thought Islamists objecting to films offered by the video store may have been behind the bombing.

An Interior Ministry official said the two Kuwaitis are under arrest and had "confessed" to the attack and to the involvement of the Jordanian. The official, who described the Artistes Centre as a video store, said the case has now been referred to the public prosecution to bring charges.

Lebanon sees boosted Syria ties

(Continued from page 1)

Lebanon's Minister for Electricity and Water Resources Elie Hobeika.

"The Economy Minister (Yassin Jabber) is going to make some proposals to reweight the trade balance which favours Syria," Hobeika said in an interview with a private Lebanese radio station on Saturday. Imports from Syria, mainly oil products, reached \$236 million in 1996 while Syria bought \$69 million of Lebanese goods.

Mr. Hobeika said that certain unresolved points of a 1994 accord on sharing water from the Orontes River will be examined by the committee.

Mediterranean Charter is adopted in Madrid

(Continued from page 1)

tries to cooperate and work together, said Miguel Angel Martinez, chairman of the executive council of the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity.

"The organisation is a body to bring together people from different cultures to address their common concerns and cooperate," he told the Jordan Times, adding that the adoption of the charter is a political gesture by relevant personalities and non-governmental organisations about the need for Europe and the Mediterranean to work together. Stressing the need of inter-cultural dialogue, he said people of different cul-

tures "have information about each other but do not know each other. What is needed is for people to develop knowledge of each other through direct dialogue."

The Mediterranean Charter Organisation is expected to be funded by the European

Union and will be concerned with implementing the principles of the Charter.

The charter draws on the principles embodied in the Barcelona Declaration of November 1995 which identifies three basket areas of cooperation between Europe

and the Middle East.

The Barcelona Declaration pledged about \$12 billion development package for the Mediterranean with the aim of creating a free-trade area between the EU and the 12 non-member Mediterranean states.

Crown Prince returns after successful Spain visit

(Continued from page 1)

Arab-Israeli peace talks.

Prince Hassan, who on Friday warned that short-term gains should not be made at the expense of the long-term imperative of achieving comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, expressed concern that the spiral of violence could endanger the peace process.

Responding to a question on Jerusalem,

Prince Hassan said that while Israel says that Jerusalem is its capital, Jordan and the Palestinians believe that the capital of the Palestinian state should be established in Jerusalem.

But the Crown Prince stressed the need to pursue comprehensive peace, hoping that "Muslims, Christians and Jews (in the region) will contribute to the spirit of the millennium by demonstrating a successful example of inter-communal coexistence."

Israeli shares rally but public has yet to buy in

TEL AVIV (R) — Israeli share prices greeted the new year with a powerful rally and while most analysts say the rise looks sustainable, the broad investing public has yet to join in the celebration.

"The market is sick of being in a slump," said Jonathan Ross, a vice president at Nesuah Securities. "There is an awful lot of money ready to invest — money in short-term shekel deposits."

That money — estimated at 100 billion shekels (\$30.8 billion) accumulated as the public bailed out of equities over the last three years — has yet to find its way into stocks.

Nevertheless, the Mish-

tanin index of 100 leading shares rose 8.9 per cent in the first five trading days of the year as trading volume rocketed to nearly 200 million shekels a day, more than three times its level in October. Along the way the MAOF index of blue chips eased slightly through what Mr. Ross called the "iron ceiling" technical barrier of 223-224 points.

In fact, the 1997 rally began in the last two months of 1996, but it gained momentum accompanied by a high increase in turnover this year.

Analysts say that after such big gains, Israeli shares are now due for a correction.

"I would argue that the

market needs a small correction before it can go on to a bigger rise," said Roger Hornett of Societe Generale Strauss Turnbull Securities in London. He said the correction would be about three to four per cent.

Mr. Ross said he did not see the MAOF falling below its old ceiling.

For now the market has shrugged off political problems — the impasse in talks between Israel and the Palestinians over a Hebron redeployment and the upsurge in clashes between Israeli troops and militants in Lebanon.

Over the longer term, analysts warned, further deterioration in the Middle East peace process could undermine the market.

Israel's economy has begun slowing from its fast-paced growth of 1990-95 but Mr. Hornett said the market's positive factors outweigh those issues.

Israeli stocks are trading at about 13 times prospective 1997 earnings, versus 17-18 times in comparable international markets, he said. Societe Generale is forecasting 20 per cent real earnings growth for traded companies this year.

Mr. Hornett expects economic growth to pick up this year. He said Israel's gross domestic product expanded four per cent in 1996 (less than the government's preliminary estimate of 4.4 per cent) but that it will rise to 4.5 per cent this year.

He expressed satisfaction with the government's budget-cutting programme for 1997. But more important

is that short-term interest rates will gradually come down at about 20-30 basis points a month from the current base rate of 14.7 per cent.

The market has its eye set on the 100 billion shekels of cash held by the Israeli public, but analysts say that for now the rally is being driven by a much narrower class of investors.

Eyal Koka, of Sigma Securities, said mutual funds, the main investment vehicle for small investors, have been the major buyers. But he said portfolio managers and insurance companies have been providing the liquidity by buying units. "It's certainly not the public returning to the bourse," he said.

"I think you have a good deal of participation by those who never left the market... What you're seeing now is a lot of asset shifting," said Mr. Ross.

A small number of buyers have had an outside influence because the market has a comparatively small float and lacks liquidity. "The market is not only reacting to positive sentiment but to the lack of liquidity," Mr. Ross said, warning: "If foreigners come to the market (in large numbers), we won't have enough shares to sell them."

Analysts said it is only a matter of time before the public returns. With interest rates heading lower and the property market in a slump, said Mr. Hornett, stocks are irresistible.

"It's the only asset class that will go up," he said.

Airports see new surge in passengers

GENEVA (R) — World airports saw a steady climb in passenger traffic during the first nine months of last year but cargo lagged behind its 1995 growth rates, according to a report issued this week.

The Airports Council International (ACI) said that its 477 members around the globe had reported nearly 1.9 billion travellers passing through between January and September, 6.2 per cent more than in the same period in 1995.

ACI said all its six regions recorded significant growth, led by the Asia/Pacific market with a total of 6.9 per cent.

North America recorded 6.5 per cent, Europe six per cent, the Middle East 5.4 per cent, Africa

4.9 per cent and Latin America and the Caribbean 2.1 per cent.

ACI director for economics, Paul Behnke, said the returns showed that apart from the expected surge in Asia and the Pacific they were good news for the industry as a whole.

"Even the more mature aviation markets of North America and Europe are showing that the demand for air travel is not tapering off, a trend our member airports welcome as they expand to meet air traffic flows in the 21st century," he said.

If maintained to the end of the year, the passenger growth rate at six per cent would be one per cent higher than the figure for the whole of

1995.

Cargo moved from January to September totalled just over 36 million tonnes, 5.1 per cent up in the first nine months of 1995. But in the whole of 1995 it grew six per cent over the previous year.

The report said 914 million passengers passed through North American airports during the January-September period, nearly 565 million through European and 280 million through Asian airports.

North American airports moved just under 19 million tonnes of cargo. Asian and European airports each moved close to 7.4 million tonnes.

ACI said Chicago's O'Hare held its position

as the world's busiest passenger airport with just over 52 million people passing through. 2.7 per cent up on the same period last year.

It was followed by Atlanta, boosted by hosting the summer Olympic games, which recorded nearly 48 million travellers, Los Angeles with 44 million and London's Heathrow with just over 42 million — up 2.5 per cent on the first three quarters of 1995.

Busiest cargo airport remained Memphis, which moved 1.4 million tonnes for an increase of 10.2 per cent. It was followed by Los Angeles with 1.25 million tonnes, Miami with 1.24 million and New York's Kennedy with 1.19 million tonnes.

Daily Beat

Nabulsi sees no justification to push interest rates higher

** BY RAISING the interest rates gradually over the past few years, Jordan was able to achieve many objectives towards consolidating the foreign currency reserves of the Kingdom and the Central Bank, Jordan's former governor of the Central Bank, Mohammad Said Nabulsi said in a lecture. He pointed out that despite negative effects on the economic activity, investments and the (Amman) financial market, the high interest rates have also consolidated the Jordanian balance of payments.

Dr. Nabulsi said it would be hard now to justify any new measures for raising interest higher unless interest rates on the dollar and other main world currencies go up sharply in international markets. As such a situation is not looming in the horizon, the former governor said that there could be a scope for some flexibility on interest rates in 1997. He linked the flexibility to continued improvement in the level of foreign currency reserves at the Central Bank as a result of "convincing" improvement in the balance of payments over a period of time.

"There should not be any thinking of lowering the interest rates before achieving the aforementioned conditions," Dr. Nabulsi indicated. However, he said that the Central Bank can continue to take certain measures that can lessen the impact of high interest on industry by allowing businesses to borrow in foreign currency.

In addition to interest rates, Dr. Nabulsi spoke about currency controls noting that the Central Bank has given its written undertaking to liberalise recurrent payments and declaring the Jordanian currency to be convertible in accordance with article eight of the agreement with the International Monetary Fund. He affirmed that all currency controls have been lifted except for one restricting capital transfers which is being maintained for balance of payments considerations.

"There are calls to liberalise capital transfers to encourage investments but we prefer to maintain this control until the Central Bank reserves are consolidated enough to suffice no less than three months of imports," Dr. Nabulsi said, stressing that what is required now is to issue the new legislation that would liberalise the currency of controls (Al Ra'i).

Burger King spreads empire to Kuwait

LONDON (AFP) — Burger King, the fast-food chain is to open 20 hamburger stores in Kuwait in the first half of 1997, the company has said.

The oil-rich state would become the 58th country in the world to offer Burger King parties, shakes and fries to hungry consumers once the first outlet opens there in February.

The fast-food giant will convert stores belonging to the Al Homaizi food-stuff company, currently operating under the Hungry Bunny brandname, into its own restaurants.

"Kuwait is an important and well-developed market and we are delighted to have found a partner of Al Homaizi's calibre to continue our successful expansion in the region," managing director for Burger King Europe, Middle East and Africa, David Williams, said.

The company already operates 26 outlets in the Gulf region: in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Oman.

All meat served in its Kuwaiti outlets will be 100 per cent halal, the company said.

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ORGANIZED MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR SATURDAY 11/01/1997											
PAST 12 MONTHS HIGH	PAST 12 MONTHS LOW	COMPANY'S NAME	P / E	DIV. OF	NO. OF SHARES	NO. OF TRADED	VALUE TRADED JD	OPEN PRICE	CLOSE PRICE	CHANGE	
1,230	1,880	MID. EAST INV. BK.	74.2	0.00	22	44550	49981	1.14	1.13	-0.01	
5,250	4,250	THY. HOUSING BK.	12.8	2.88	7	17642	83729	4.75	4.80	+0.05	
2,950	2,440	JOR. KINAT BANK	19.0	0.00	2	72	188	2.66	2.62	-0.04	
4,180	3,480	JOR. ISLAMIC BANK	17.7	0.00	6	350	13248	3.71	3.69	-0.02	
3,000	2,380	UNION BK. SAV. INV.	7	0.00	1	2250	3263	1.45	1.45	0.00	
BANK SECTOR TOTALS											
2,830	1,830	JOR. TREASURY INSUR.	5.4	10.53	1	2600	4928	1.91	1.90	-0.01	
6,170	3,700	ALSHAR AL-ARABI	15.3	3.33	1	250	1500	6.17	6.00	-0.17	
INSURANCE SECTOR TOTALS											
1,830	1,450	JOR. ELECTRIC PWR.	11.3	7.36	8	3783	6155	1.63	1.63	0.00	
1,560	1,250	TRIBO ELECTRICITY	9.4	0.00	2	100	143	1.47	1.43	-0.04	
1,750	1,080	NATL. PORTFOLIO	9	0.00	5	650	780	1.23	1.20	-0.03	
2,250	960	KARKA EDUCATION	9	0.00	1	1000	1030	1.05	1.03	-0.02	
2,290	1,690	DRIFTED CO.	11.2	4.72	42	18450	39291	2.19	2.12	-0.07	
1,200	820	UNION LAND DEV.	8	0.00	1	50	42	0.85	0.84	-0.01	
SERVICE SECTOR TOTALS											
3,730	3,060	JOR. CEMENT FACT.	18.9	3.03	25	9543	31513	3.33	3.30	-0.03	
6,000	4,950	ARAB PETROLEUM CO.	17.0	3.57	5	880	4921	5.58	5.60	+0.02	
10,400	8,720	JOR. PETROL REFINERY	9.9	6.21	3	220	1149	9.82	9.74	-0.08	
3,710	1,650	INDUSTRIAL COMM. SER.	33.2	0.00	6	1015	2523	2.60	2.47	-0.13	
4,730	3,040	ARAB PHARM. MANF.	19.3	5.70	11	848	2967	3.54	3.51	-0.03	
6,450	5,650	JOR. CERAMIC IND.	7.5	4.13	3	800	400	1.63	1.60	-0.03	
2,350	1,570	JOR. PAPER CARBON	8.9	7.50	1	250	486	3.12	3.24	+0.12	
3,830	3,100	JOR. PAPER CARBON	16.6	3.09	2	150	13475	4.91	4.90	-0.01	
7,450	4,250	OAS ALDAMA DV. INV.	13.4	4.08	1	2750	4788	5.90	6.05	+0.15	
5,800	3,130	ARAB ALUM. IND.	8.8	8.45	1	1000	3550	3.64	3.55	-0.09	
960	450	LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	9	0.00	17	12431	7634	0.63	0.61	-0.02	
1,440	1,060	NAB. PAPER CONV. TRD.	7.9	8.93	10	4250	4775	1.17	1.16	-0.01	
1,020	540	NY. TONAL. LMS.	10.1	8.82	4	2250	1515	1.11	1.07	-0.04	
1,600	930	HYPERMART. PETRO. CHEM.	9	0.00	18	6750	7235	1.11	1.07	-0.04	
1,270	870	JOR. SULPHUR CHEM.	9	0.00	1	100	80	0.83	0.80	-0.03	
3,250	1,440	UNIV. HON. LMS.	5.2	11.76	8	3150	5368	1.73	1.70	-0.03	
1,940	2,140	JOR. INFO. RESOURCES	14.1	0.00	5	2950	3781	1.29	1.28	-0.01	
1,390	840	JOR. NEW CABLE CO.	25.0	0.00	8	4500	4160	0.94	0.92	-0.02	
2,460	1,750	EL. CAY READY WEAR	7	0.00	3	427	810	1.91	1.90	-0.01	
INDUSTRIAL SECTOR TOTALS											
113,12	113,12	INDEX	-0.26		133	54273	102296				
AND TOTAL											
152,88	152,88	INDEX	-0.11		242	149282	306804				
PARALLEL MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR SATURDAY 11/01/1997											
800	500	JOR. TRADE FAC.	13.6	0.00	12	7500	1825	0.53	0.51	-0.02	
890	700	UNION INV. 504	69.8	0.00	12	55500	12213	0.71	0.73	+0.02	
1,990	270	ARAB PET. INVEST.	9	0.00	4	11250	5083	0.47	0.45	-0.02	
1,050	850	UNITED FOR FINAN. INV.	9	0.00	1	500	425	0.88	0.85	-0.03	
800	510	ARAB FOOD & MED.	8	0.00	1	300	186	0.65	0.62	-0.03	
680	450	ARAB INTL. INV. TRD.	9	0.00	4	4000	1950	0.52	0.49	-0.03	
900	520	NATL. TEXTILE	8	0.00	1	600	316	0.53	0.50	-0.03	
970	400	NATL. MULT. ENG. NAHICO	8	0.00	11	9500	4750	0.53	0.50	-0.03	
760	430	NAVYAK DYES & MOULDS	8	0.00	2	450	239	0.55	0.53	-0.02	
590	70	JORDAN STEEL	8	0.00	6	712	541	0.75	0.74	-0.01	
720	430	ARAB ELECT. INDUS.	8	0.00	1	50	26	0.50	0.52	+0.02	
780	620	MIDEAST PHARM. 757	8	0.00	5	2200	858	0.67	0.64	-0.03	
770	570	RACI PHARM. 654	8	0.00	14	17523	4281	0.60	0.60	0.00	
1,360	760	IN-S. CERAMIC	8	0.00	5	3250	2603	0.80	0.80	0.00	
850	580	PEARL SAM. P. CONV.	8	0.00	3	560	387	0.72	0.69	-0.03	
840	590	WTL. POLYTEX	8	0.00	1	100	69	0.66	0.68	+0.02	
1,020	800	AR-D. INT. FOOD FACT.	69.5	0.00	2	450	446	1.02	0.99	-0.03	
1,100	530	MT. EAST COMPLEX	8.1	0.00	30	28700	19806	0.72	0.69	-0.03	
AND TOTAL											
134	134	INDEX	-0.11		134	171365	68533				

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RUTIVE

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Answer: What his wife thought of the new birth - IT SUITED HIM

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South's jump to four clubs was Gerber Convention. Used rectly over an opening bid of one two no trump, it asks for ace a continuation of five clubs is a quest for kings. North's response owered three aces and no kings, d South settled in clubs.

Sports

Chang beats Sampras for third Kooyong Classic title

MELBOURNE (AFP) — Perseverance is a word Michael Chang believes best typifies his tennis career and the tigerish American was at it again here Saturday in coming from behind to claim his third consecutive Kooyong Classic title.

Chang tuned up for Monday's Australian Open with a 4-6, 6-4, 6-2 win over world No.1 Pete Sampras in 90 minutes to follow up his previous triumphs over Sampras in 1995 and Russian Yevgeny Kafelnikov last year.

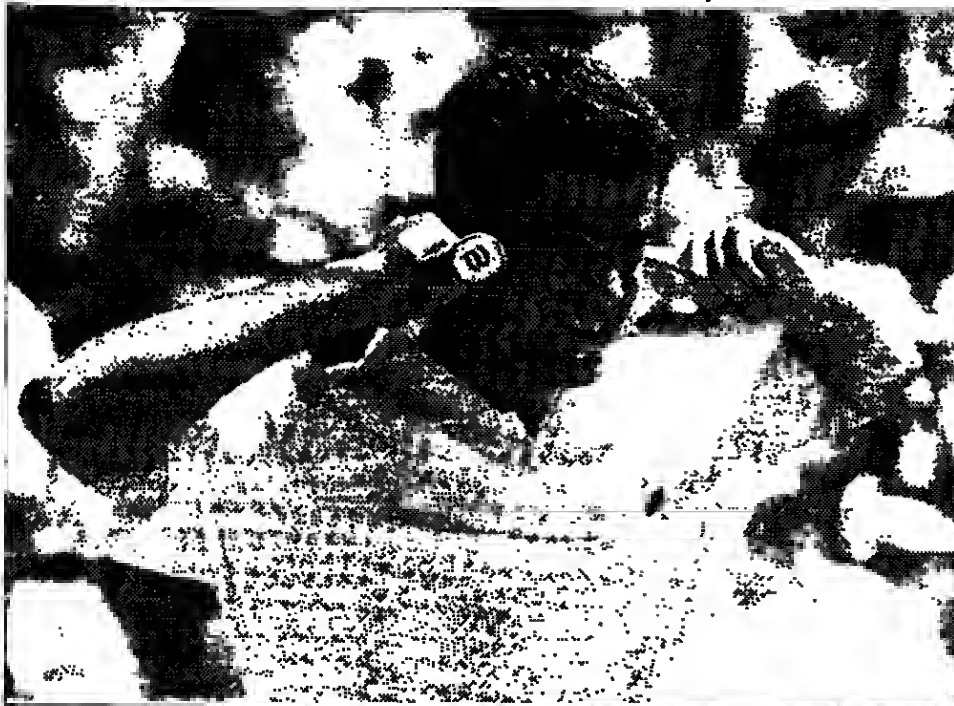
Although only an exhibition tournament to help the leading players prepare for the year's opening Grand Slam, Chang believes by persevering he can crack his second major title since his 1989 French Open breakthrough triumph.

Asked how another classic victory would help him win the Australian Open after coming up short in the last two seasons, 24-year-old Chang told his post-match press conference: "If there is one word to sum up my career it's beco perseverance. I've had to persevere through a lot of things and it's fair to say that over the last couple of years I've got to a lot of majors and finals and come up short."

"For me it's something that I have to pick myself back up and try again."

"I feel I have a personality where it's okay for me. It's not something that bothers me too much. I'm not afraid to pick myself up and I'm not afraid of falling short."

"I have to give myself that opportunity and strive for



World number one Pete Sampras of the U.S. holds his fingers in his ears as the crowd cheers on his opponent Michael Chang during the final of the Colonial Classic in Melbourne. Chang defeated Sampras 4-6, 6-4, 6-2 to win the trophy for the third consecutive year (Reuters photo)

better things.... if first you don't succeed, try, try, again."

No one can doubt Chang's tenacity on the tennis court and next week he begins his quest for his second major, seeded second to Sampras.

After coming off the court Chang discovered that his first round opponent will be lucky loser Kris Goossens of Belgium, ranked 132 in the world.

"Whoever you beat the world No.1 you've got to feel pretty good so I'll have a light day tomorrow ... physically I feel good and mentally I feel fresh and excited to see what's in store for me," said Chang. Similarly there are no

problems dogging book-makers' favourite Sampras heading into the Open.

"This week was a good preparation for me. I hit the ball pretty well. I feel fresh and ready to go on Monday," he said.

"The wind always gives me the most problems here, it swirls around and is very difficult to play, but it's the same for both guys and he seemed to handle it a lot better than I did today."

Sampras said he knew nothing of his Romanian Dino Pescariu first round opponent at the Open, but would scout around among rival players to gather some information on him.

Pescariu is ranked 169 in the world and won his way

through to the main draw via qualifying. His best effort in a Grand Slam is reaching the second round of the 1991 French Open.

"I hopefully will find something out over the next day or two, what kind of player he is and what he does, it's always difficult to play someone you've never seen."

"I've been in that situation before playing guys that I've never seen before so you just have work your way into the match."

"You take every advantage you can get out there as far as strategy is concerned and far as what he likes to do, hopefully I'll find something out."

Australian Open Sampras faces unknown in first round

MELBOURNE (R) — World No. 1 Pete Sampras will open his challenge for a second Australian Open tennis title with a first round match against a mystery qualifier he has never even heard of.

Romanian Dino Pescariu battled through the qualifying rounds at the national tennis centre to earn the dubious reward of facing the top seed.

Sampras, who is chasing his ninth Grand Slam title, will devote the remaining time before the tournament starts on Monday trying to

learn more about the 22-year-old unknown, ranked 169 in the world.

Asked if he recognised Pescariu's name, Sampras replied: "No — I know nothing about him at all."

"Hopefully, I will be able to find someone who knows him. It is always difficult to play someone you have never seen before as you have to just hit your way into the match."

"I will try to get an idea about him because you need every advantage in terms of strategy," said Sampras, who won the Australian

Open three years ago.

Second seed and world number two Michael Chang will play another player unable to gain automatic entry in the draw, lucky loser Kris Goossens of Belgium, ranked 132 in the world.

Goossens benefitted from the high injury toll that has decimated the Open, opening several more places for lowly-ranked players.

"I don't want to take anyone for granted," Chang said after his victory over fellow American Sampras in the Colonial Classic exhibition event at Kooyong on Saturday. "I've done that in the past and got burned."

Russian Yevgeny Kafelnikov, the fourth seed, heads the list of late casualties after being forced to pull out of the Open on Friday with a broken hand.

Fifth seed Thomas Muster also discovered the identity of his first round opponent at the conclusion of the qualifying tournament on Saturday.

The Austrian will play American qualifier Geoff Grant.

A profile of the leading contenders in the men's and women's singles at the Australian Open tennis championships starting Monday

Pete Sampras, USA: Joined Jimmy Connors and John McEnroe as the only players to finish number one for four or more consecutive years last season. Won eight titles in nine finals, the most by any player, including the U.S. Open (beating Michael Chang), his eighth Grand Slam title. Dropped out in the third round by Australian Mark Philippoussis in the shock of last year's Australian Open. Had the best 1996 match record of 65-11. Power serve his best weapon, but has great array of groundstrokes and unflappable temperament. Won the 1994 Australian Open, finalist '95 and semifinlist '93. Age: 25. Right-hander. World ranking: 1. Grand Slams: 8. Australian Open match record: 23-5.

Michael Chang, USA: Relentless competitor who never knows when he is beaten. Finished 1996 at his all-time highest ranking of second in the world and finished second only to Sampras with the best match record of 65-19. His efforts to strengthen his all-round game were rewarded with three titles from eight finals. Beaten by Boris Becker in last year's Australian Open final and by Sampras in the U.S. Open final. Has still to follow up his 1989 French Open title when he was the youngest Grand Slam champion at 17. Age: 24. Right-hander. World ranking: 2. Grand Slams: 1. Australian Open match record: 14-4.

Goran Ivanisevic, Croatia: Temperamental left-hander who bases his game on bullet serve and on his day can be unstoppable. Enjoyed his best season in 1996, winning five titles and reaching five other finals and was runner-up to Becker in the Grand Slam Cup in Munich last month. Finished the year with 77-26 match record. Best Grand Slam performance last year was semi-finalist at the U.S. Open losing to Sampras. Served 1,477 aces last year. In seven visits best efforts are quarter-final appearances in '94 and '89. Age: 25. Left-hander. World ranking: 3. Grand Slams: 0. Australian Open match record: 13-7.

Thomas Muster, Austria: Became the second oldest player at 28 to be ranked No.1 for the first time last February and again dominated the clay court season winning 7 titles and finished the year at number five. Broke through for his first Grand Slam at the 1995 French Open beating Michael Chang. Best Australian Open performance was reaching the semi-final in '89 and a quarter-finalist '94. Ferish trainer and has 15-7 five-set record. Age: 29. Left-hander. World ranking: 5. Grand Slams: 1. Australian Open match record: 18-8.

Boris Becker, Germany: Returning as the defending Australian Open champion after winning his sixth career Grand Slam from Michael Chang in the final. Troubled by injuries last year and only played at Wimbledon apart from Australian Open but was forced to withdraw with a wrist injury during his third round match. Closed out the year with the Grand Slam Cup title over Ivanisevic in Munich and heads into 1997 as the active career titles leader with 49. Ranks second behind Pete Sampras in career prize money (\$23.8 million).

Commanding figure entering his 14th year on the circuit. Age: 29. Right-hander. World ranking: 6. Grand Slams: 6. Australian Open match record: 29-8.

Steffi Graf, Germany: The dominant player in women's tennis winning the last six Grand Slams she has contested and heading into the Australian Open with 21 career singles Grand Slams, just three short of Australian Margaret Court's record 24. Injuries have prevented Graf from playing at the last two Australian Opens and she is bidding for her fifth Australian title in nine attempts. Injuries disrupted her last year but still the one they have to beat over the next two weeks. Age: 27. Right-hander. World ranking: 1. Grand Slams: 21.

Arantxa Sanchez Vicario, Spain: Effervescent campaigner who lost last year to Steffi Graf in the finals of the French Open and Wimbledon. Bowed out of last year's Australian Open after a titanic battle with American Chanda Rubin 16-14 in the third set of the quarter-finals. Finished the year ranked at number three. Possesses great ability to keep ball in play with her retrieving. Age: 25. Right-hander. World ranking: 3. Grand Slams: 3.

Conchita Martinez, Spain: Reached the semi-finals of the French and U.S. Opens last year, but missed out on a final appearance. Finished year ranked fourth. She upset Graf at Wimbledon in 1994 to become the first Spanish woman to win there in the open era. Consistent from the back court. Age: 24. Right-hander. World ranking: 4. Grand Slams: 1.

Martina Hingis, Switzerland: Exciting 16-year-old prodigy who reached the Wimbledon final in New York last November where she lost in five sets to Steffi Graf. Won titles at filderstadt and Oakland and was a semi-finalist at the U.S. Open and a quarter-finalist at last year's Australian Open. Beat Jennifer Capriati to win the Sydney International final in the leadup to the 1997 Australian Open. Remarkably composed and displays great variety which marks her as a future No.1. One to be watched over the next fortnight. Age: 16. Right-hander. World ranking 6. Grand Slams: 0.

Jennifer Capriati, USA: On the comeback trail after a well-documented fall from grace amid drug and stealing charges and two burn-out. Barcelona Olympic champion and was a runner-up to Martina Hingis in the Sydney International in the leadup to the 1997 Australian Open. Great forehand and has been working on fitness. In her only two appearances at the Australian Open in 1993 and 1992 she reached the quarter-finals. Dangerous unseeded floater. Age: 20. Right-hander. World ranking 37. Grand Slams: 0.

Rescued British yachtsman may need hospital care

CANBERRA (R) — Rescued British yachtsman Tony Bullimore appeared on Saturday to be in worse condition than first thought, with the Australian government saying he may need to be treated in hospital when the rescue ship docks.

The captain of HMAS Adelaide reports Mr. Bullimore may require hospitalisation when he arrives on Monday," deputy prime minister Tim Fischer told reporters.

Bullimore, 56, was rescued on Thursday after surviving for four days in an air pocket in his upturned yacht, battered by antarctic seas 2,600 kms (1,600 miles) from Australia.

The Adelaide also rescued

French yachtsman Thierry Dubois, a competitor in the same race.

The Australian, a national newspaper, reported that one of Bullimore's frostbitten fingers might have to be amputated. He has already lost part of another in an accident on the yacht.

He was suffering from hypothermia and dehydration as the crew took him aboard on Thursday and asked for a cup of tea.

As a search continued for another competitor in the French-organised Vendee Globe solo race, missing Canadian Gerry Roufs, Dubois said future events might have to assign a rescue ship to accompany the yachts.

The yachts of both Dubois and Bullimore capsized to heavy weather, and the Frenchman said that would have to be addressed.

Race organisers have lost contact with Canadian Roufs, who is in an eve more remote part of the ocean between New Zealand and South America with only a merchant ship searching for him.

A royal Australian air force Orion Maritime aircraft saved another race competitor, Raphael Dinelli, on December 27 when it found him and dropped a life raft a few minutes before his overturned yacht sank.

Bullimore's against-the-odds survival story is now expected to attract commercial interest. Australian media quoted promotional experts as estimating Bullimore could expect to make A\$2 million (\$1.6 million) from his rescue, the closest ever to Antarctica.

Dubois told France 2 television by radio he had been certain of dying but clung to life because he had not seen enough of it.

Women's downhill canceled for foul weather

BAD KLEINKIRCHHEIM, Austria (AP) — Foul weather forced cancellation Friday of a women's World Cup downhill after the first seven skiers had completed the race.

Heavy snow overnight and fog delayed the start of the race, scheduled to begin at noon, by one hour and 45 minutes.

But after the first seven skiers had finished, the fog thickened and organizers halted the race, saying two downhill events would take place on Saturday, weather permitting.

A World Cup super-G race is scheduled for Sunday.

"The safety of the girls comes first, and for safety reasons it was impossible for the race to take place today," said Hans Pumml, the Austrian coach.

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♥Q5
♦Q1078
♣107852
SOUTH
♠74
♥KQJ10752
♦QK5
♣AJ
The bidding:
NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST
1NT Pass 44 Pass
2NT Pass 54 Pass
3NT Pass 60 Pass
Pass Pass
Opening lead: Three of ♠
Follow the play of this hand, then decide if declarer adopted the best line.
South's jump to four clubs was the Garber Convention. Used directly over an opening bid of one or two no trump, it asks for aces and a combination of five clubs is a request for kings. North's responses showed three aces and no kings, and South settled in six hearts.

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Bahrain, Qatar to sign deal to call off media war

DUBAI (R) — Bahrain and Qatar, locked in a bitter territorial dispute, are expected to sign a memorandum of understanding to end a war of words between the two small Gulf states, a Gulf diplomatic source said on Friday.

The seven-point document has been drafted by Saudi Arabia, which heads a four-state mediation committee, he said.

Besides discouraging the negative media campaign, it (the document) commits the two parties to desist from making wild charges against each other and use their official and diplomatic channels to express their views," the source told Reuters.

"But it does not address the heart of the territorial dispute between the two countries," he added.

The source said the memorandum of understanding will be signed by the foreign ministers of Qatar and Bahrain on Sunday when they meet in Riyadh.

Qatar and Bahrain have been locked for decades in a dispute over a cluster of potentially oil-rich Gulf islands, sandbanks and reefs held by Manama since the 1930s but also claimed by Doha. The two countries' state media have been engaged in a bitter war of words.

Qatar has taken the case to the International Court of Justice at The Hague, a move staunchly opposed by Bahrain which insists on an Arab solution.

Ties worsened further after Bahrain accused two Qataris of spying and boycotted the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) December summit to protest against Qatar's refusal to withdraw the case.

Bahrain last month pardoned the two Qataris after a state security court sentenced them to three years in jail for spying.

Doha granted political asylum to a Bahraini air force pilot, who defected to Qatar in December but returned his helicopter.

On Tuesday, the foreign ministers of Qatar and Bahrain met in Riyadh, under the auspices of the GCC committee, for the first time in more than a year to narrow their differences.

The source said the signing of "the memorandum of understanding between Qatar and Bahrain in Riyadh will be the first step towards closing the gap between them."

"Other matters, like the border dispute could be taken up later," he added.

Other members of the mediation committee, set up by the GCC summit in Doha in December, are Kuwait, Oman and the United Arab Emirates.



RAMADAN IN BEIRUT: A Lebanese popular singer performs late Friday in a tent especially built for the Muslim holy month of Ramadan at a Beirut waterfront cafe. The tent serves the suhour meal, the last before the day of fasting from dawn until dusk. Crowds of people spend the evening eating, drinking tea, smoking the traditional narguile and playing backgammon at such Egyptian-style Ramadan tents which recently invaded Beirut (AFP photo)

Peru poised for new talks to resolve hostage crisis

LIMA (R) — Peru braced on Saturday for a new round of talks between the government and Marxist rebels holding 74 hostages inside Japanese ambassador's home in Lima as efforts to end 25-day crisis were stepped up.

After nearly two weeks of stalled negotiations, Education Minister Domingo Palermio spoke with Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) leader Nestor Cerna Cartolini on Friday to arrange a meeting at the besieged residence for the weekend.

But Mr. Palermio, chief negotiator in the crisis, insisted the government would accept nothing short of the release of all the remaining captives.

"My goal is to free the 74 hostages in their entirety, to good health and as quickly as possible," Mr. Palermio told foreign correspondents who witnessed his four-minute, walkie-talkie conversation with the guerrilla leader.

News of the renewed talks was greeted as a breakthrough in Tokyo, where concern was still high for about two dozen Japanese diplomats and businessmen held by the gunmen.

The mood has changed. Until now it has been a stalemate, but... It seems there is some movement," a Japanese Foreign Ministry official said.

Mr. Palermio and Mr. Cerna were polite and good-humoured in their contact, which broke a logjam in conversations that has lasted since the last hostage releases on New Year's day.

Mr. Palermio also spoke by telephone with President Alberto Fujimori during his nearly three-hour meeting with correspondents from Reuters, the Italian news agency ANSA, Agence France Presse and Mexican TV Channel ECO.

At the heart of the talks between Mr. Palermio and Mr. Cerna will be the rebels' main demand that about 400 jailed comrades be released. President Fujimori has rejected this demand.

The MRTA have freed more than 430 of the hostages they seized after storming an exclusive cocktail party at the residence Dec. 17. It still holds top government and security force officials, Japanese businessmen and diplomats, and Mr. Fujimori's younger brother, Pedro.

Mr. Fujimori hailed the talk with Mr. Cerna as a "good sign" that raised "hopeful prospects" of a bloodless end to the crisis.

"We have established a bridge via today's radio contact," he told local radio station Radio Programas.

Mr. Palermio has not met Mr. Cerna

since their only face-to-face encounter Dec. 28 when he won the release of 20 hostages. They have stayed in contact via short, handwritten messages.

He keeps Mr. Fujimori updated constantly, speaking to the president 20 to 30 times a day.

A senior government source said a provisional "guarantor committee" was being set up to supervise a possible negotiated end. The committee would include members of the government and "two or three very strong institutions or countries," the source said.

Mr. Fujimori has said the rebels could be offered safe passage to another country if they laid down their arms and released the captives.

About 20 MRTA rebels entered a small jungle village on Friday to demand food and spread propaganda, local radio reported.

In the first such action for several months, a rebel unit of 13 men and seven women, woke up residents of Palcazu in the central Pasco region, around dawn. CPN Radio said.

They collected food, gave speeches about the takeover of the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima, and painted slogans on walls.

"Long live the MRTA" and "long live the takeover of the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima" read some of the slogans, according to CPN.

The MRTA's armed members, estimated to number 250 at most, are mainly based in Peru's central jungle area. The government source said two Peruvian government ministers still held by the MRTA "want to be the last to leave. (Foreign Minister) Francisco Tudela said: 'I want to go out last. Tell the president not to worry.'"

He added that despite early reports the rebels numbered 20 or more, "we now know there are only about 15 of them inside."

Captive Bolivian Ambassador Jorge Gudiño appeared smiling and waving at a residence window Friday afternoon after his daughter persuaded police outside to play some Andean folk music over loudspeakers for him.

Earlier Friday, the rebels fired four shots in the air before dawn in an apparent reminder to the world of their heavily armed presence. The jungle-trained rebels possess AKM assault rifles and grenades and have booby-trapped and mined the compound.

Experts resume missile search in Iraq

BAGHDAD (AFP) — United Nations weapons inspectors resumed on Saturday their search for banned missile components in Iraq, officials said.

"The experts are pursuing their mission," an official with the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) told AFP.

The official released no details on the results of the latest search mission, which began five days ago.

Goran Wallen, director of the UNSCOM monitoring and verification center here, said on Monday that the inspectors were monitoring Iraqi excavations at one site outside Baghdad.

He said they were looking for new missile remains and documents.

The searches are aimed at finding engine parts from Soviet-made Scud missiles which were not included in an inventory Iraq gave to UNSCOM, prompting suspicions Baghdad is still hiding between six and 16 missiles.

The 10-member inspection team is expected to stay until the end of January.

The U.N. Security Council last month urged Iraq to stop preventing U.N. inspectors from transferring nearly 130 engines for Scud missiles to the United States for study.

The analysis would allow UNSCOM to deduce how many Scuds Iraq retained after determining whether the engines now stockpiled at UNSCOM offices in Baghdad were imported from Russia or made in Iraq.

Peres calls for quick Hebron agreement to ward off violence

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israeli opposition leader and former Prime Minister Shimon Peres urged Saturday a quick deal on Hebron to avoid further violence.

"We have to proceed quickly, because it would be dangerous to give partisans of violence and terrorism, who could act at any moment, the chance to threaten the entire peace process," Mr. Peres told Israeli radio during a visit to Paris.

Mr. Peres met Palestinian President Yasser Arafat in Paris during a U.N. forum on the late French President Francois Mitterrand.

"I found Yasser Arafat to be very serious and concerned about continuing the negotiations," said Mr. Peres, architect of the peace accords with the Palestinians and current Labour Party leader.

Yasser Arafat told me he is demanding an implementation to the letter of the concluded Hebron accords, particularly the issue of completing Israel's military redeployment on the West Bank," Mr. Peres said.

Mr. Arafat accused Mr. Netanyahu on Friday of "sabotaging the peace process" by demanding a two-year delay to complete Israel's military pull-back from the occupied West Bank.

Hebron talks stalled this week over Palestinian insistence that Mr. Netanyahu respect an already agreed upon timetable and withdrawal Israeli troops from most of the West Bank by September this year.

Netanyahu wants the post-Hebron redeployments dragged out until May 1999 — when the two sides are due to complete a final stage of negotiations on a permanent peace settlement — and U.S. peace envoy Dennis Ross has offered a compromise date of late 1998, a proposal rejected by the Palestinian side.

Mr. Arafat said on Friday the building of Israeli settlements in Palestinian territories threatened Middle East peace and urged the world to save the peace process.

Mr. Arafat, addressing a Paris seminar in tribute to Mr. Mitterrand, said the settlements were making the principle of land for peace an empty slogan.

Accusing Mr. Netanyahu of procrastinating on implementing the accords on Palestinian autonomy, he said the world should be aware of the danger.

"Peace is in danger. We must act to save the peace process from collapsing," Mr. Arafat and Mr. Peres voiced confidence that Israelis and Palestinians would reach agreement as both recognised peace was their only option.

"What we have solved so far is an indication of what we can solve in the future," Mr. Peres said.

Mr. Arafat and Mr. Peres, embraced warmly before taking their seats at the seminar Mr. Peres referring to Mr. Arafat in French as "mon ami" (my friend).

Both paid tribute to Mitterrand as a pioneer of Middle East peace who saw through the complexities of Middle East conflict, and voiced confidence, as Mitterrand had, that peace would prevail despite the current difficulties in the peace process.

"(Mitterrand) was sure the peace agreement would gather force and neither of the two sides would have the strength to pull it down," Mr. Peres said.

Mr. Arafat recalled Mitterrand's ground-breaking speech to the Knesset in 1982, when he called on Israel to open dialogue with the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), and Mr. Arafat's official audience at the French presidential palace in 1989.

"(Mitterrand) was one of these great politicians whose realism can turn a dream into a vision," he said.

Mr. Peres recalled that Mitterrand warned him against continued occupation of Palestinian territories, telling him: "Don't think you can have an enlightened occupation."

He said the late French leader had been careful throughout his 14-year rule to alienate neither Israelis nor Palestinians.

The Israeli Labour leader, a long-time friend of the socialist Mitterrand, emotionally concluded: "We will always cherish a man who could see the morrow of our lives and see that the future is a consequence of the future rather than a continuation of the past."

The Russian Foreign Ministry official insisted that Cyprus had every right to take steps to maintain its defences.

"The contract to supply S-300 missiles, which are purely defensive, is fully in line with the U.N. Charter and in no way upsets the balance of power in the region," he told Interfax.

The United States and Britain have warned that deployment of the missiles would lead to an arms build-up undermining efforts to end the 23-year division of Cyprus (see related stories on page 2).

Turkey's senior general is to visit Cyprus next week on the heels of the warnings by Ankara that it would take military action if Greek Cypriots go ahead with the plans to deploy missiles.

Turkish newspapers also reported that the government was considering blocking the straits of Turkey, Bosphorus and Dardanelles to prevent the Russian anti-aircraft missiles from reaching Cyprus by ship.

Ankara may also build naval and air bases in the northern third of Cyprus under its control as a retaliatory measure, and set up a radar jamming system to disrupt the S-300 missiles, the papers added.

Turkish military Chief of Staff General Ismail Hakkı Karadayi is to arrive Monday in Nicosia for a two-day visit accompanied by senior officers, the Turkish Foreign Ministry announced, without elaborating.

The general was invited by Rauf Denktaş, the head of the breakaway Turkish republic of northern Cyprus, which is recognised only by Ankara.

Gen. Karadayi's visit corresponds with that of U.S. envoy Dennis Cavanaugh, who is expected in Cyprus on Sunday in a bid to reduce mounting tensions on the island over the decision by Greek-Cypriot authorities to buy the missile.



German jailed for snake smuggling

WASHINGTON (R) — A U.S. judge handed down the stiffest ever jail term for reptile smuggling, sentencing a German man to almost four years for conspiring to smuggle hundreds of endangered snakes and tortoises into the U.S. and Canada.

Wolfgang Michael Kloe of Raenberg, Germany was sentenced in Orlando, Florida, to 46 months in prison, after pleading guilty last October to conspiracy, smuggling, money laundering and attempted escape.

Simon David Harris of Blairgowrie, South Africa, was given three years probation for smuggling Madagascan tree boas and spider tortoises into Florida from Frankfurt, Germany in August 1996. The animals were discovered when a customs service officer at Orlando International airport felt something stirring inside Harris' suitcase, the Justice Department said.

Branson sees second balloon trip

LONDON (R) — British tycoon Richard Branson will have one more go at flying round the world by balloon and then give up dangerous adventures — unless he has a chance to go into space, Branson, 46, who had to abandon his first balloon circumnavigation attempt on Wednesday after less than 24 hours because of technical problems, told the Sun newspaper in an interview published on Saturday that his family wanted him to try again.

"I've discussed it with my family and they're behind me all the way," he said. "This will be my last adventure — unless I can get into space."

Morris says Clinton thought Powell could beat him

NEW YORK (R) — President Bill Clinton was terrified at the thought of retired General Colin Powell running for president, telling confidants "he'll run a great campaign and he'll beat me bad," Clinton's former top political adviser Dick Morris says in a new book. Morris, who quit the 1996 campaign in August after being involved in a sex scandal, also says in the book that Clinton thought his Republican opponent Bob Dole was "an evil, evil man."

Morris added that Clinton was completely committed to doing all he could to make Vice President Al Gore the Democratic Party's presidential nominee in the year 2000.

Rebels did not recognise Fujimori's brother

LIMA (R) — President Alberto Fujimori's younger brother Pedro was not recognised by his rebel captors for 10 days in Peru's hostage crisis, a government source said on Friday.

"They only found out it was Pedro Fujimori when his name began to figure in local media as one of the hostages," said a senior government official, who asked not to be named.

Fujimori's mother and sister were also among the more than 500 guests at a Japanese embassy cocktail party stormed by Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) rebels 24 days ago. They too were apparently not recognised by the rebels and freed within hours with all the women and elderly captives.

Arafat eyes Benelux bloc for Mideast

GAZA CITY (AFP) — Palestinian President Yasser Arafat said Sunday he has a dream of a regional economic bloc including Israel which he dubbed the "Benelux" of the Middle East. "Peace has to be constructed on a strong foundation of economy, and I can see, dream, that in the future we will have a strong Benelux from Jordan, Palestine and Israel" and at a later stage Lebanon, Mr. Arafat told Israeli businessmen.

Benelux groups, the Northern European countries of Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, Mr. Arafat also expressed his hope that the Palestinian economy, which he said would be a free market, would "imitate the success" of the Israeli economy, Israeli public radio reported.

Iraq protests to U.N. over Turkey's incursions

BAGHDAD (R) — Iraq protested to the United Nations against Turkey's "continuous violations of Iraq's airspace and territory," the official Iraqi News Agency (INA) said on Sunday. "The repeated Turkish troops' shelling of Iraq's villages and towns and encroaching illegally on its territory represent a flagrant violation of Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity," INA quoted from a letter sent by Iraq's Foreign Minister Mohammed Al Sahaf to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Turkish armed forces, backed by aircraft, have frequently crossed into northern Iraq in pursuit of rebels of the Kurdish Labour Party (PKK), government fully responsible for these aggressive acts" and urged the United Nations to "put an end to such threats and aggression."

Saudi dissident in London says he is broke and is using family funds

LONDON (R) — The London-based Saudi dissident Mohammad Al Masari, whose fax campaign against the Saudi royal family severely strained relations between London and Riyadh, says he is financially broke.

In an interview with the Guardian newspaper published on Saturday, the former physics professor said he had debts of more than 100,000 pounds (\$168,000) resulting from his campaign and was living on state welfare payments.

"It is not a secret. I am broke and I am not going to lie about it. I have had to use some of my family's money to keep my movement going," Mr. Masari said.

"I still owe about 50,000 pounds to my lawyer, who fought my deportation case. Then there is about 10,000 to 15,000 pounds owed to British Telecom and another 30,000 to feature fax for sending out our faxes. I simply have no way to pay them," he said.

Mr. Masari's Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights was the first opposition group to emerge in Saudi Arabia and

bombarded the kingdom with up to 2,000 faxes a week.

His activities enraged the Saudi royal family and when Britain's arms manufacturers expressed fears for their lucrative contracts with the kingdom, the British government tried to deport him. An immigration appeals court ruled last year he could stay in Britain for another four years.

Since then one of Mr. Masari's main allies has formed a rival group and Mr. Masari has lost the support of many liberal Britons over remarks last July calling for the annihilation of Jews.

He also angered potential supporters last year by supporting what he called the intellectual arguments behind a bomb attack in Dhahran in June that killed 19 U.S. soldiers.

Mr. Masari told the Guardian that he still receives some funds from Britain's Muslim community and had a relationship with a militant British Muslim group called Al Muhajiroun.

Velayati accuses Iraq of contradictory approach

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati on Saturday accused Iraq of being contradictory in efforts to improve relations between the two countries, which were at war during most of the 1980s.

"We are noticing a contradiction in the words and the actions of different Iraqi leaders," he told Radio Tehran.

"In official interviews and in private Iraqi leaders express their desire to develop Iraq's relations with Iran but they say the opposite in their public declarations and to the press," Mr. Velayati said.

"The pursuit of this policy proves the existence of instability in political decisions and on the subject of developing relations with its neighbours."

Iraq and Iran are facing increasingly bleak prospects for reconciliation after two attacks in Baghdad which have been blamed on Tehran and a continuing dispute over prisoners of war from their 1980-1988 conflict.

Baghdad has blamed Tehran for a mortar attack on Tuesday against the Baghdad offices of Iranian opposition group Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, but Iran has dismissed the accusations as unfounded.

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's son Uday also pointed the finger at Iran after the attempt on his life on Dec. 12.

